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TALES FROM THE VOICELESS





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TALES FROM THE VOICELESS

by

MARCELLA HARDY



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I tender the humble offering of my gratitude to the subjects which afforded me such delight in writing about them; and I gladly acknowledge my debt to those Editors who generously found space in their journals for these writings.

It is with affectionate gratitude, too, that I acknowledge my debt to those two friends, W. Wolff and P. V. Pathy, for allowing me to use their photographs to illustrate this book.

Madras, June 1947

MARCELLA HARDY



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INTRODUCTION

A wayward road meanders through the pages that follow from one historical place to the next ; it follows no recognised tourist route, but touches here and there, wherever prompted by fancy, and stays awhile to listen to tales of old stones and buildings, to the murmur of the countryside, to the stories of place-names, to the wordless and voiceless lays of past life. From this silent communion with those things that have gone to make the present, much has become intelligible that formerly seemed strange ; much that, at first sight, appeared commonplace has revealed its originality, much that seemed inarticulate has found fongue.

As though urged by the sea winds of the Coromandel Coast, the wayward road starts from the lovely beach of Madras and heads north-westward to Vellore, a lovely name that recalls the times when the original village lay in a grove of babool trees ; the road then curls southwards to halt at Seven Pagodas, known more correctly as Mamallapuram after its founder. Though deserted of people, it is full of nature's songs. From Mamallapuram to Chidambaram, the 'heart of the universe', is a cross-country run, a leap from the monuments of one dynasty to those of the next, from religion to metaphysics ; from Chidambaram to Pondicherry is a bridge in time and ideology, the one lives its traditions and the other survives its fall from its commercial purpose. But, as the wind blows westwards, the road leaves to the left hand the deeper south to cut across the Salem plateau first to Namakal and then to Tiruchengode, where nature sculptured rocks and hills to stir the human mind to a vivid imagination that peopled them with gods, up the stream of the great river that borders the plateau, the Cauvery, life-giver of the south, over its cataracts at Hoganakal, perhaps the wildest spot of the entire course, and up to its source in Coorg of the Western Ghats, a little country of its own and a cradle of beauty. Still led by whimsy, the road plunges down the steep wooded mountainside to the deep green leisureliness of the Western Ghats, Malabar of pre-historic and historic memories, where pinprick contests not so long ago echoed the rivalries of distant



regions. And, as it sought the source of the river, so does the road seek out a spring for such rivalries and goes up to Bombay, there to listen behind the great roaring voice of the modern city, to the faint lays that have grown into the roar of today; from the song of fisherfolk to the symphony of commerce. In one of these lays echo tales of farther north, and the road heads towards Ahmedabad to retrace there the ballads woven into the fabric of the city's attenuated life.

From Ahmedabad the road is carried along by the great highway across rich plains and wooded hills, and across the Malwa plateau. At Gwalior, the meandering road meets the great cross-ways of history and travel, and seeks to go no further for a while. It harks back to the tales it has heard on its journey, and listens to what these strategic surroundings have to say. These experiences of travel and sympathetic listening are gathered here, that they may be shared with all those who enjoy travelling in time as much as in space.

The wayward journey was not made at one time; indeed, it took a number of years and haphazard wandering, nor were the places visited in the order in which they come in this book—some were seen by design and others by chance. In the course of historical study, some had already become so familiar to the mind that seeing them in fact was like meeting old friends; others, with their mute appeal and seemingly unaccountable presence, led to a study of their past and their meaning; or another, like Bombay, that is usually taken so much for granted and that talks so loudly of the overwhelming present, once in a while shyly hinted at a time when there was no big city, as might some prominent self-made personage drop a casual remark about childhood days in rural surroundings. This, too, led to study and more intimate acquaintance with antecedents.

None of the essays claim to be scholarly, nor are they meant to be so, though the historical data come from conscientious study. The essays would only hope to quicken an interest in the countryside and its people, not in uncritical, maudlin praise, but with affectionate seriousness and retrospect. More than mere quickening of interest, however, they would hope to quicken inspiration, to stir a full realisation of potentialities; no mere repetition of what has gone before, but a pride in ancestry that is translated into creative action. Though there is a background of melancholy—of



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nostalgia, perhaps—to most of these essays, it is not a melancholy of loss, but rather of loving urge; it is a melancholy of revolt at useless mourning over past glories but acquiescence in present inanition and neglect. Past glories are wonderful to remember only if their praises stimulate endeavour; for, inner will alone can revive the fires of action.

The break between the past and the present is only apparent; there is no break in the heritage, for it is found dormant yet alive throughout the countryside. Nor would it be right to claim the heritage if there were a break, for then it would be like claiming the ancestry of others, and nature does not countenance such things. Potentialities lie precisely in this heritage; it is mute for those who will not hear its voice, but it speaks calm and full to those who do not think it dead, who feel it alive.

It may well be that these tales from the voiceless are shells too frail to carry such ambitious themes; they may themselves be too inarticulate to convey their purpose, and read like no more than travel talks. Yet, perchance, they may sound a sympathetic chord in some equally wayward mind; they may help to formulate some half-perceived unrest, some feeling of enquiry; they may, perhaps, encourage a fellow traveller along some other meandering road. Should even but one of these hopes be fulfilled, it will give me deep happiness, indeed.



CHILDREN OF THE COROMANDEL

For generation after generation, so it would appear, for century after century, the fishermen of the Coromandel have put out to sea. Learned in the lore of the sea and the dangers of nature, but fearless and persevering they ride the surf on their *catamarans*; on their skill and courage depend their own lives and those of their families.

Night and day, long heaving breakers spread their foam on the shore; regular and ceaseless, as it were the pulse of the Coromandel, these breakers fringe in white a stretch of coast that extends from Cape Comorin to the estuary of the Godavary river. The broad strip of clean white-golden sand has nursed and sheltered the bronzed, sinewy, wiry fishermen so characteristic of this coast.

From father to son these fisherfolk, naked save for a scanty strip of cloth and the distinctive pointed bonnet, have plied their trade in *catamarans*, described already in the seventeenth century by a traveller as "nothing more than 3 or 4 little planks or beams joined together and fastened securely like rafts." Some were covered with a net and could carry a little sail made of the bark of trees, with which they sailed very quickly. When the fishermen wanted to row, says the traveller, they sat partly in the water rowing with their feet as well as with an oar with flat ends; by these means they fairly sped over the water. "... they Seize 4, 5, or 6 large pieces of boyant timber together," says another traveller, "and this they call a catamaran upon which they can lade 3 or 4 tunns weight. When they go on fishing, they are ready with very Small Ones of the like kind, that will carry 4, 3, 2, or one man onely, and upon these Sad things, they will boldly adventure out of Shore, but indeed they Swimme (in generall) as naturally as Spanyalls."

As the breakers rise with one last mighty effort before spreading on the sands, the men launch their *catamarans* and paddle them out on the back-draught of the receding



waters. Time after time, unerringly, they will repeat this feat with seemingly instinctive skill; a skill come to them from their first toddling years.

They are off, past the line of shallow greeny-brown waters and on to the rich cobalt blue of the deep sea; the breeze from the shore fills the sails and pushes the craft well out into the open. As a writer records, they have been seen one league and more offshore, when the westerly winds were blowing so hard that they could not even attempt to paddle back; but the fishermen "made Sleight" of this and let fall their anchor—a stone tied fast to a line—leaving the *catamaran* to ride by it, while they swam to shore against the wind and the sea.

When the menfolk are out fishing, there is work for the women to do in the little huts of plaited palm-leaf; there is grain to pound, the hut to sweep and the ground to be sprinkled with water, or perhaps a design to be traced at the threshold. There is the food to prepare against the return of the men; and there are clothes to wash, the children to attend, or gossip to listen to. For the men who have not gone out to sea there are, perhaps, the logs of their *catamarans* to careen or nets and sails to mend; there are lengths of twine to twist into strings for new nets, and there is the casting of the drag-net that will bring in its supplementary harvest of fish.

As the sun grows hotter, naked children gambol over the sands; they dive into the breakers to catch small prawn-like creatures as crab-bait; and others manage to spare a little of the time absorbed in listening, watching, and playing, to the spinning of the rough yarn on the spindles their mothers have entrusted to them.

Slowly, laboriously, the drag-net is drawn in; one by one the men and boys along the shore join in the tugging of the heavy ropes; gulls flock along the line of floats and scream with anticipation; all at once the quiet beach becomes full of eager lookers-on, of women come to buy their share of the haul. The head fisherman steps inside the net onto a pile of shining wriggling creatures, small and large; he measures out in small earthenware vessels the amount every woman will carry to market, while the poorer folk outside the closely packed circle pick up the rejects and remove small fish from the substance of jelly-fish brought in with the catch and at once cast away. One by one the women cross the sands towards the



market, balancing their baskets and vessels on their heads, their partly naked torsos erect and steady above the rhythmic swaying of their hips.

By now the *catamarans* are beginning to return ; the sun is high and the first catch is over. The sails are taken down and rolled up, then placed alongside the outer log ; steered by the paddle the crafts come to ground on the crest of the surf and are drawn beyond the edge of the waves. Women in brick-red or ochre-yellow saris come hurrying from the huts, wives and daughters and mothers bringing food for their men, and the large earthenware jars into which the fish are emptied from bags of plaited palm-leaves. The women of each family group take the catch to the market, the proceeds of which are divided in the evening among the members of the crew ; a small portion, perhaps, being set aside for the hire of the craft, if the family does not possess its own. The purchase of a *catamaran* entails ceaseless labour, for it costs a goodly sum and has to be replaced every ten years.

When the bags are emptied of their fish, the men wrap them round the little earthenware pots that contain their mid-day food ; the mouths of the pots are then stopped with half a hollow coconut shell, over which a cloth is stretched, making the food safe from seawater. Once more the bow is headed towards an oncoming breaker, once more the little craft is lifted and then carried on the back-draught of the wave ; with never a backward glance the men set off for the day's second outing, nor will they return until well on in the afternoon.

Practically nothing has changed in the lives of these fisherfolk since travellers wrote wonderingly about them, over two hundred and fifty years ago. Brave men in their "Sad things" are still today the admiration of visitors to the Coromandel Coast. The "boyant timbers" are still carried by elephants, so one is told, from the forests of Ceylon to the shore, many hundreds of miles away, for shipping to India, just as they always have been. The mast and yard-arm are still bamboo poles, and the paddle even today becomes a rudder when the sail goes up. The same home-made anchor serves the same purpose as in former times. The fisherfolk tell you that they buy their ropes from shops, nowadays, and do not know whether they are still made from coconut fibre ; but, surely, this cannot have changed either, as such



rope has qualities needed for these folk, qualities that surprised the early European sailors to the shores of India. The picturesque little sails once made of the bark of trees now come from local mills—that is a really modern touch.

Yet, long before any mills existed anywhere in the world, and long before the East India Company ever established factories along the coasts of India, these fishermen braved the sea in their tiny, unprotected *catamarans* and caught fish for their livelihood. It was, indeed, just below a hamlet of plaited palm-leaf huts belonging to those self-same fishermen that Fort St. George, which became Madras, was erected. And it was, too, by these self-same *catamarans* that urgent letters were sent down the coast, for greater speed and safety from highroad interference. In the Factory Diary dated 13th February, 1702, is the entry: "Despatched per cattamaran for Fort St. David (to be forwarded thence) our letters to Pondicherry, Negapatam, and Tranqueboar . . ." Again, it was in *catamarans* that "cargazon" was laded to and from the great ocean-going ships that were obliged to anchor some distance from the shore.

The fishing hamlet no longer lies a little above the site of Fort St. George, as it has been removed some distance below to make way for the famous harbour of Madras ; but it is as open to the rigours of the monsoon on the edge of the beach as in the early days of the Company. Plaited palm-leaves and a few bricks for the less poor are the building material for these huts that shelter a whole community from sun and wind and rain, even today ; now, as in ages past, "there is little to earn and many to keep".

In the late afternoon the breeze brings back the fishermen to shore ; as the womenfolk carry off the catch, the men haul in their craft on the beach, or take their youngsters for initiatory spins before untying the logs and setting them to dry, with the sail and nets, ready for the morrow's work. Still glistening from spray, these men with weather-beaten features tumble about the sands with their babies ; still drenched in sea-water and almost naked a fisherman will remove his elegant pointed bonnet and find in the nest of his hair a dry cheroot and box of matches. With the calm and deliberate movement of his kind he lights up and puffs meditatively with a last glance at the sea, ere he turns homewards for the evening bath and meal.



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As the beach empties of human life, only grey logs of wood, patched sails, and rust-red nets laid out to dry on the sands remain to tell of a perilous and ancient calling; of brave and simple men to whose primitive crafts and implements few navigators of the present day would care to entrust their lives.



A TALE OF ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE

The tale of the Apostle Thomas is a sea unspeakably vast.

—(THE ACTS OF THOMAS)

Perhaps the oldest site of Christian worship and legend on the east coast of South India is that of the beautiful cathedral of San Thomé, a section of present-day Madras.

The cathedral stands over the reputed sepulchre of St. Thomas the Apostle who worked and reached martyrdom in India, and was no less a person than Doubting Thomas himself. After the death of Jesus, the apostles apportioned among themselves the various quarters of the known world where each was to preach the word of the Master; India and the Far East and parts of Africa fell to the lot of St. Thomas. He is historically known to have visited the court of an Indo-Scythian king at Taxila in the Punjab, very early in the first century. From the testimony of the Doctors of the Western Church, it would seem that Thomas was the most widely travelled of the apostles, while his deeds and apostolate in India are extolled in many early writings, notably in the hymns of the Syrian Church dating from the fourth century. In those times there was no trace of doubt that Thomas was a historical person and that he had preached Christianity in India and other far-off lands.

It would appear that, after some travel and work in various countries, Thomas reached the coast of Malabar, probably at Cranganore, where he carried on his ministry. From Malabar he travelled overland to the Coromandel, settling down finally in the ancient Tamil town of Mylapore, the Town of Peacocks, which exists today as a part of Madras. The name was no fantasy, for the saint seems to have been wont to seek retirement on a small hill, a short distance from the town, where peafowl abounded.

In Mylapore, Thomas preached, made converts, erected his own church, and performed miracles. He was, however, put to death by order of the local king, and thus won the crown of martyrdom in the name of his faith. He was buried in



his own church. About two centuries later, a merchant named Khabin is said to have removed the bones from the tomb in Mylapore and carried them to Edesa, a town in Syria which has now disappeared. Of the two feasts of St. Thomas, the one observed by the Syrian Church on July 3rd commemorates the bringing of the apostle's bones to Edesa, while that observed on December 21st by the Western Church recalls the date of his martyrdom.

One of the earliest local versions of St. Thomas' martyrdom is given by Marco Polo, late in the thirteenth century; it tells how the apostle was accidentally killed whilst praying on his little mount by the stray arrow of a huntsman in search of peafowl.

Miracles did not cease with the death of Thomas; for, with the earth on which his blood had fallen, miraculous cures were made by his disciples. It was the custom, says an ecclesiastical traveller of the fifth century, to give the pilgrims that flocked to Mylapore for the annual festival of St. Thomas, a handful of this blessed earth to carry home as a relic. The fame of Thomas the Apostle was soon spread far and wide over eastern and western Christendom; even King Alfred the Great of Britain is reported to have sent emissaries to the shrine in Mylapore.

In India, St. Thomas' shrine and the reputation of his miracles continued to attract large crowds not only of Christian converts, but of people of every class and religion; pilgrimages were made in delightful tolerance to the Little Mount where St. Thomas had often retired to meditate, to the Big Mount where he had suffered martyrdom, and to his church where the dust from his tomb cured the sick. Indeed, so generally was the spot revered, and by such diverse people, that when Duarte Barbosa came there, he found an aged fakir in charge of the shrine, which was sadly neglected and dilapidated.

The colony of Syrian, or Nestorian Christians that had settled in Mylapore fell into such disrepute with the rest of Christendom, after about the sixth century, that the real tomb of St. Thomas, though still revered locally, might perhaps have passed into oblivion but for the interest and enthusiasm of the Portuguese in 1507. Expeditions were sent to make investigations; repairs and additions were executed in the church. By 1521 the Portuguese had definitely settled in Mylapore and had taken over charge of the church and relics.



As it stood in 1507, the shrine of St. Thomas was a very ancient edifice, twelve cubits long, constructed like a church, with pillars and roof of wood. The sacristy was surmounted by a small dome and topped by a spire thirty cubits high. The interior was decorated with crosses and peacocks in plaster—a nice piece of local colour. At a pistol shot's distance—to use a contemporary expression, or unit of measure—was a small chapel said to contain the remains of an Indian prince, a convert-follower of St. Thomas himself. In the course of some excavations there came to light an inscribed stone which read: "I give 1/10 income of trade both by sea and land to this holy house, and so long as sun and moon endure, I enjoin my descendants to maintain it under pain of maledictions." The name of this generous donor was 'Prince Tani Mudolyar', undoubtedly the very same convert-follower of St. Thomas whose chapel stood hard by. Most precious of the finds, however, was a broken lance, the very one that had transpierced the saint's body.

San Thomé de Meliapore, as the Portuguese named their new settlement, soon grew into a handsome, well-built town that reached, by the seventeenth century, more than twice the size of the garrison-town of Fort St. George, three miles farther up the coast. After many vicissitudes, San Thomé, with all its numerous new churches and colleges, was finally ceded to the English East India Company.

But the old, old church that had seen such changing times and such a variety of parishioners, that had heard the voice of St. Thomas and the Te Deums of successful adventurers, and whose treasures had been honoured and preserved by non-Christians and Christians alike, was pulled down late in the nineteenth century, to be replaced by certainly the most handsome building of European construction in Madras, if not in South India—the present cathedral of San Thomé.

It is a far cry to the days when St. Thomas the Apostle rode about Mylapore on his ass, his body clothed in a long white gown, and a fan of peacock feathers in his hand. Nonetheless, the faithful still flock to the scene of the saint's ministry and martyrdom and show—another piece of delightful local colour—the place where he left the imprint of his feet.



THE VILLAGE OF BABOOL TREES

There are no crocodiles now in the ditch round the Fort of Vellore ; there are lotus blossoms instead. Once upon a time, perhaps down to about one hundred years ago, the Vellore crocodiles were a fearsome lot that fed, so one reads, on political prisoners, criminals, repentant sinners, and the soldiers of attacking armies. Manucci, at the end of the seventeenth century, writes that when he visited his old friend, Gulam Ali Khan, in Vellore, curiosity led him to the edge of the ditch where his shadow on the waters was enough, he says, to attract whole hosts of these monsters, the one swarming over the other with jaws agape. Being unable to satisfy their greed with whole sides of goats, Manucci avers that he had the heads thrown in as well ; these also disappeared, horns and all. Apparently these crocodiles were gradually killed off, for want of a better sport, by the officers garrisoned in the Fort after the end of the Mysore wars. It may be, too, that there was no further use for them, now that there were new ways of dealing with criminals and political prisoners.

The Fort itself is not only beautifully built, but very well preserved, nor does it show any signs of ever having needed repairs, so solid was its first construction. The walls of great grey blocks of granite tone in with the green foliage that rises above them, and with the soft patchwork of lotus leaves in the ditch ; from almost any point the eye catches an endless variety of attractive vistas of the walls with their overhanging trees reflected in the still waters. This Fort of Vellore, unlike so many other forts of olden times, is built on level ground instead of crowning some dominating height. The three peaks of the hill to the south of the town, however, have fortifications dating from Mahratta and Bijapuri occupation in the seventeenth century, showing that these armies, too, realised the danger of bombardment from the heights if these were occupied by the enemy—an observation made, sometime later, by a British officer.

Except for the tower of the old temple, the hand of



modernity has changed much inside the Fort area and given everything a sad utilitarian appearance. The old temple-tank is now a parade ground; the original Hindu village and bazaars are covered by administrative offices and ugly bungalows; the garrison church of indeterminate architecture stands on what was once the house of the Muslim governors which, in its turn, stood on the ruins of the palace of the Hindu chieftains of Vellore. It was in this palace of the Rayulus that the last important king of the decimated Vijayanagar territories held his brilliant court during the first years of the seventeenth century; a court where painters and musicians, philosophers and other learned men assembled, and where the Jesuit fathers entertained such high hopes of converting a Hindu king to their faith. All that is gone now: the high hopes, the great philosophers and musicians and artists and nothing but the echo of their creations remains. Complete dissolution followed closely on the death of the old King Venkatapathi II, in 1614.

One of the many tales told about this Fort is that, in 1676, as one of Shivaji's generals was besieging the Bijapuri forces then in occupation of Vellore, and finding no way of overcoming their resistance, he sought counsel of the Swami of the Chelvavinayagar temple which he had recently erected. The Swami instructed him to perform a *sarpayagam*, or snake sacrifice, on the banks of the Palar river that now flows three miles from the town. Having built a Vishnu temple and a Brindhavanam—for, in those days, even campaigning took its own time, and haste was not in vogue—close to where the modern bridge now stands, the general performed the *sarpayagam*; whereupon swarms of cobras were found all over the Fort. Unable to bear this scourge, the Bijapuri governor gave up possession and fled to a place about two and a half miles from Vellore where he built himself a settlement, and named it Abdullapuram—even today one of the suburbs of the town is called Abdullapuram, and some old ruins seen there are said to be those of this governor's palace.

Perhaps the most jarring note of modern times in the Fort area is the housing of police recruits in the temple precincts. It is true that no worship is held there any longer, nor has there been any held for a number of decades, but it is none the less a protected monument, and it still contains beautiful pieces of sculpture. A delightful frieze of well-



carved elephants, tigers, and other animals runs round the outer walls of the inner sanctuary; the corners of the stone roofs have an unusual upward tilt worked in the semblance of leaves being pulled back by a parrot; the sacred ant-hill in which Siva in the shape of a five-headed cobra is said by tradition to have resided before this temple was built, is still within its special little cell; close by is the famous well accessible by a flight of steps. The pivot-door at the foot of these steps is believed to lead to a subterranean mansion where the temple jewels are hidden and guarded by an evil spirit. Nobody knows for certain, but during the great famine of 1877-78, the water-level in the well sank so low that one of the office clerks—the temple was already unlucky in that it was used as an arsenal—pushed open the pivot-door and penetrated into a noble *mantapam* supported on pillars. This *mantapam*, moreover, appears to have had a passage leading farther into the depths of the earth, but the clerk investigated no further.

Just inside the great and imposing doorway into the temple is the celebrated Kalyana Mantapam, attributed to Vijayanagar inspiration. Here, in former days, was celebrated the great yearly festival of the wedding of Sri Jalakanteswara. Warriors with lances poised bestride rearing steeds that as it were leap out of the pillars with their strange attendant gnomes as bases; each pillar is different from its neighbour, and every facet is delicately carved. All around the plinth runs a frieze of charming little local scenes such as visitors to South India in the fifteenth century describe so vividly, and such as may still be seen today in any town or village. There are the little girls at their stick dances, musicians with their instruments, peasants bringing baskets of produce from their farms; all scenes, attitudes, occupations and implements that one recognises with a thrill of pleasure. The ceiling, too, is finely carved with geometric designs, flowers, and human figures; and there comes the feeling that faith and tradition alone could have guided the tools that patiently worked the granite into life-like forms.

In the entrance porch of the temple, beneath the tall and massive pyramidal tower, a small panel high up on the left is said by tradition to represent the simple figure of Bommi Reddi attended by his wife. This Bommi Reddi is said to have been the founder of the temple and fort of Vellore



The story goes that once upon a time, somewhere in the thirteenth century, two brothers found their way to the pleasant village of Velapaddi. Bommi and Timmi Reddi were the sons of a wealthy owner of cattle of Bhadrachalam on the Krishna river; after their father's death, some dispute arose between the two brothers, now grown to manhood, and their half-brothers who, apparently, were plotting to do away with them. So Bommi and Timmi left Bhadrachalam and their inheritance and took the road as pilgrims towards Rameswaram. On their way they stopped at Velapaddi, the Village of Babool Trees, and found that the extensive fields all around were fertile and well tilled, that placid sheets of water irrigated the countryside, and rice grew in plenty; to the southwards rose rugged hills of richly coloured rock, and to the west, the lovely wooded hill of Kailasagiri lifted its head into the pure, still air. At the foot of Kailasagiri lay the prosperous township of Kailasapatnam ruled, so the folk told the brothers, by Raja Karikala Chola.

This prince who bore such an illustrious name treated the brothers kindly and granted them permission to settle in Velapaddi and to rear cattle. The cattle had prospered and the brothers grown rich; so rich, indeed, and of such consequence that, when the jealous neighbouring chief brought his men to capture these fertile tracts, Bommi and his followers easily defeated the aggressor. Raja Karikala was so well pleased with the brothers' deed that he bestowed on them much wealth and granted them many privileges. But Bommi had no military ambitions and preferred to lead his life of peaceful occupations.

Now, it is said, Bommi Reddi owned a cow with five teats. One day, when on his rounds, Bommi came upon this cow milking a five-headed cobra that was known to inhabit an ant-hill in the middle of a pond. This cobra, of course, was Lord Siva; and, as Bommi lay in bed that night, pondering on the remarkable incident, the god came in a dream and told him where the hidden treasure lay, and instructed him to build a temple with it. The treasure was unearthed, and close to it a natural *linga* was also found.

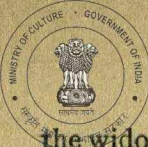
About this time, it is also said, there happened to be in Velapaddi an architect from Northern India, who was travelling through the south country to see its temples. To this man Bommi entrusted the building of his temple, and



the work was started about April of the year 1274. And now another wonderful thing happened—one associated with more than one other spot chosen by Siva—for, one day, a hare started up close to where the masons were at work and turned on Bommi Reddi's dogs, chasing them round the pond and the ant-hill. Simultaneously a voice was heard explaining that the line of the chase should be marked out, as it represented the circumference of a fort that should also be built by Bommi. In exactly nine years the temple was completed, and it was consecrated to Sri Jalakanteswara, that is, to Lord Siva of the Pond. Unfortunately, by some miscalculation, the building of the temple had been started on an inauspicious day. Who knows but that may be why such distressful times followed the first flush of prosperity!

Meanwhile, the architect's son had set out in search of his father; he found him at last near the recently finished temple. As his work was not complete and the fort still to be built, the son helped his father work out a good day and hour on which to start. Slowly, the massive structure rose out of granite blocks brought from a quarry thirteen miles away; these blocks were cut and fitted so as to require no mortar to hold them together. All the art and cunning to render a fort impregnable were used: it was given only one entrance at the end of a winding roadway closed by great gates protected by a drawbridge; the wide wet ditch was no less than fifty cubits across, the outer bank being faced all round with masonry of the same granite blocks; a subterranean passage connected the ditch with a large tank nearby to ensure a constant water-level. Such was Bommi's fort which took well nigh twelve years to build and which some centuries later, was still to arouse the admiration of military observers. As soon as the fort was ready, the patron god once more visited Bommi and instructed him to present both it and the temple to his chieftain, Maharayulu Venkatadeva of Denkanikota. And this is where, in the year 1295, one takes leave of Bommi Reddi and the realms of legend and tradition to enter those of history, for the Maharayulus of Denkanikota are a historical family, and history records the names of eleven rulers.

During the various wars with Mysore, the East India Company found Vellore a convenient centre from which to operate; it changed hands on several occasions and finally remained with the British. It was here, in the Fort, that



the widows of Tipu Sultan lived out their exile after the fall of Seringapatam in 1799. Down the Arcot road, at the foot of Murtazagarh peak, is the neglected garden wherein the tombs of these exiled ladies lie. Inscriptions in fine Arabic script will tell their stories, but there is none, today, who stops to read them, not even to replace the bricks that Time slowly dislodges from the abodes of eternal rest—or should one say oblivion?

A few memories of the past are still found in the town of Vellore. Chanda Saheb's mosque and the Arabic College close by; a handsome Jesuit church on the lower slopes of the hill rises, couched in greenery, to suggest vividly an *aperçu* of a European vista; a poor-house, which is said to have been built and maintained by a relative of the Nawab of Arcot during a famine, in the eighteenth century, all remind one of history, as does the record of the stay by the exiled Raja of Coorg of some of his period of captivity in the Fort.

Being the district headquarters, modern Vellore has a sturdy jail, almost as well known as the fort itself and, for many a long year, the sometime residence of many a patriot. But Vellore has also its claim to progress in an excellently appointed medical college for women, perhaps one of the very few in the country. All around the countryside is delightful with its characteristic small hills of rugged rocks, rising out of a plain covered with well-tilled fields and placid tanks; indeed, the produce of Vellore is noted for its excellence. Small wonder, then, that long, long ago, Bommi Reddi fleeing from Bhadrachalam and the plots of his half-brothers chose to settle in this lovely neighbourhood, for it was its loveliness and not the prospect of becoming the theme of a traditional tale that stopped his wandering steps in Velapaddi, the Village of Babool Trees.

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WERE THERE EVER SEVEN?

The passenger sitting opposite in the bus looked at the basket I was nursing on my knees; it contained four vinca plants, two white and two mauve. A broad grin spread over his face. "Why are you taking those? They are very common plants," he remarked.

"May be, but they come from Mamallapuram."

"Ah, yes; a remembrance from Mahabalipuram," and the passenger nodded understandingly.

Although they had been culled some hours previously from a natural carpet of mauve and white, almost in the shadow of Draupadi's *ratha*, the vincas were still fresh, nor had the blossom fallen off. They were, indeed, a sweet remembrance of Mamallapuram, that lovely old spot, melodious with the cool sound of the breeze in the casuarinas, rich with fascinating sculptures, and beautiful with its broad beach of smooth, dazzling sand against the deep blue background of the sea.

Seven Pagodas and Mahabalipuram, they also call it, but scholars do not seem to agree on the origin or reason of either name. The local and, apparently, correct name is Mamallapuram, a contraction of Mahamallapuram, by which this place was known under the great patron of sculpture and architecture, Narasimhavarman I, the Mahamalla, of the Pallava dynasty. It seems unaccountable, at first sight, that this tiny somnolent village on a deserted stretch of the Coromandel Coast should harbour such sculptural treasures, though the long rocky hillocks might suggest a reason for its choice as a place whereat to create those monuments of unexampled skill. Yet, Mamallapuram has quite a simple story, and not an unusual one.

Kadalmalai, or Malai-on-Sea, or The Hill by the Sea, was once the seaport of Kanchi; a canal joined it to the city. From here much peaceful trade was carried to Burma, Java, and to the Farther East, and up the west coast, too, to the Middle East. With the growing power of the Pallavas, in the early



centuries of the modern era, the port grew in importance ; it is this Malai, lively with fleets of richly laden ships, that Tirumangai Alvar is said to celebrate in his hymns ; at this port landed the Buddhist brethren from Ceylon with whom Yuan-Chwang held learned converse ; and it was from here that the great Narasimhavarman I despatched two vast armies to help reconquer the throne of a deposed Sinhalese king. It must likewise have been from Mamallapuram that Rajasimha's embassies to the Emperor of China embarked on the well-known yet perilous journey ; and, most possibly, many of those who settled in Indonesia and helped found Hindu colonies there, had left their motherland from this port. Here, too, as in other parts of their dominions, the Pallavas left the imprint of their rule by being responsible for those temples and carved panels that stand witness to their greatness.

This was no piecing together of separately carved blocks of stone, but the fashioning, out of one boulder, of a whole temple with pillars, cells, steps from one storey to the next, whose rounded gables and *makara* motifs and ornamental carvings are reminiscent of Buddhist art. These *mantapa* and *ratha* were mostly temples dedicated to Siva and Vishnu, where the people came for worship. Research and recent translations of the inscriptions above many of the sculptured panels that run round every tier, have revealed that perhaps the earliest of these builder-kings to embellish Mahamallapuram was Mahendravarman I, who reigned for some thirty years from about A. C. 600. Both this king and his father, Simhavishnu, emerge with surprising vividness out of their background of rock from their panels in the very early *Adivaraha Mantapa*.

Amazing as is the achievement of having cut into the living rock with tools that are still imperfectly reconstructed, what is even more really wonderful is the skill and vision of the master-craftsmen. Every piece of sculpture presents that simplicity and energy of lines, and that feeling for the living form which characterises an art in the ascendant ; whether representing action or repose, the human figures and the animals seem filled with the life that their creators nursed into them ; what the chisel has merely suggested, the eye supplements and completes with effortless and unwilling ease, for the essence of the being lies in these simple lines. Among



the giant boulders piled together as though emptied from some cyclopean basket, the roughly blocked-out finial of a *ratha* above an unshaped mass, or the sketch on a sheet of rock of some future *mantapa*, suggest the method by which work of these monolithic temples was started; the sculptors seem to have begun the *ratha* from the top and worked slowly downwards, while the proportions of a *mantapa* were measured on the rock, the pillars outlined, and the blocks to be hewn away were marked in squares. To either side of one of the *mantapa* long squared blocks of rock indented at both ends and fitted the one above the other into steep, narrow steps in the face of the hill, make solid side-walls to what may have been intended as an outer pavilion; it is a tantalising thought that, perhaps, this was how the countless indentations all over the ridge of the hill were actually used as the foundations of the structural buildings that are believed to have once housed the Pallava court.

These master-craftsmen shirked neither labour nor time that their genius might find expression in works of art. It will probably never be known whether the original shapes of the boulders themselves suggested to those artists of long ago what sculptured form would most fittingly emerge; nor will it ever be known why work that had continued for well over a century should ever have been stopped, leaving unfinished so much that had been begun.

Loneliest of all, in this garden of fervent religious expression, is the Shore Temple, grey against blue, on the very brink of the sea. The wind and spray of twelve centuries have done much to obliterate precious carvings in the shrines and over the walls, but the appeal of the temple is indefinable and strong, its situation gripping. Tradition has it that once there were another six like this, reaching, in times long vanished, to the edge of the sea. But scholars, today, tend to disbelieve they ever existed, though this tradition is old and was firm not so very long ago. In writing of his flight from Madras down the coast to Pondicherry, in 1782, a Dutch ex-Factor records how, from his "thoni", he sighted the Seven Pagodas placed one behind the other, their summits washed in the spray of breaking waves; then, having doubled the foremost pagoda whose finial was just perceptible above the waters, he saw all the *ratha* of Mavalivaram rising before his eyes. Thus does the fugitive speak of what he saw; but was he



WERE THERE EVER SEVEN ?

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dreaming when he saw ?

And all the while the boom of the breakers on the shore
lulls thought back into time; the blue sky and the bluer foam-
crested sea speak of beauty and its eternity. Such memories
hover over the petals of the vincas, white and mauve.



IN THE TOWN OF THE LORD OF DANCE

The Hall of a Thousand Pillars is so immense that although there are quite a number of people strolling about in it, it seems quite empty. It is some time since the last festival took place, and the devotional paintings high up between the pillars and vaulted ceiling are faded and partly defaced; the bats that squeak and fuss about dark nooks in the capitals are oblivious of any past or future disturbance—this is their domain. “Lady, give for the sake of *dharma*,” calls a religious mendicant from his resting-place behind a pillar. There are indentations of brilliant sunlight and burning stone all along the sides of the hall, the rest is cool and dark. At every step vistas open up down the straight long rows of pillars; it seems as though one were always the centre of an infinite number of rays.

Once more in the courtyard, the sun-heated flags burn the feet, making one hurry from one patch of shade to the next, and yet, under the immense *gopura*-crowned gateways, the breeze blows cool, if not almost chill; the paving-stones feel cold and refreshing to aching feet. Inevitably there comes the thought of self-imposed mortification in the pursuit of divinity. There, sleep the emerald-green waters of the huge tank, so quiet and calm despite small groups of bathers on the steps. Through a wooden archway flanked by tall, thick, brass-studded doors of carved wood, shines the golden pillar of the Lord of Dance, and just a glimpse into the twilight of the sacred precincts reveals lighted wicks, piles of flowers, priests quietly and methodically going about their religious duties and service to the god. Close by rise enormous and ancient walls of solid blocks of stone, thickly sculptured with the many poses of one branch of the classical art of Indian dancing, *Bharata-natya*.

Human beings—pilgrims, devotees, priests, visitors—move about the temple precincts like so many pygmies in the halls of giants, while far up against the blue skies tower the sculptured cones of *gopura* and *vimana*. This is Chidambaram, the



Heart of the Universe, where Nataraja once stepped his cosmic dance to the rhythm of life itself, the rhythm of the awakening cosmos. And "Its deepest significance is felt when it is realised that this dance takes place within the heart and the self. Everywhere is God and Everywhere is the heart," writes a scholar.

Busy and colourful all round that centre of Chidambaram, the temple of the Lord of Dance, stretch at right angles to one another the many streets with shops and eating-houses, coffee- and tea-houses, restaurants frequented during term time by students of the University; there are flower, cloth, and fruit bazaars, food markets, and booths where are sold all the things a devotee may need before entering the temple. Life, everybody's life, is as it were centred round the temple, yet nobody seems awed thereby; rather does the ceaseless flow of the crowd seem to evince a friendly, or perhaps unconscious, familiarity with the ancient piled-up stone in whose shadow they live and thrive. It is always so, and it is always the visitor who is most wary of offending susceptibilities or infringing upon time-honoured customs and restrictions. A feeling of vaguely dismayed surprise arises that so much divinity should be treated in so off-hand a manner; one hardly dare stop to look up and admire the great wonder of the towers for fear of becoming a liliputian object of ridicule!

To the merry tinkle of collar-bells the shapely dove-grey bullock draws the *jatka* at a gentle trot; again, there is an uneasiness about this and one feels like apologising to the animal, for is not its natural pace a stately walk? Away from the town that clusters round the temple goes the road towards the group of pale buildings on the far side of the railway line, and at the end of a long avenue spreads the amphitheatre of the Annamalai University. The well laid-out gardens present a pleasing appearance against the background of stately buildings, lecture halls, hostels and, to the left, the extensive hall of the library and the imposing Convocation Hall; away at the back of the University buildings are the playing fields followed by the expanse of the countryside that drops in the distance as it were into the Coleroon.

It must have been all unpremeditated—but, oddly enough, it is a railway track, indicative of the present age, that separates the old town from the modern buildings of the University with the attendance of men and women students;



strange, too, that from the top of the avenue the eye seeks, but only barely perceives, the silhouette of the temple towers with their association with the great dynasty of the Cholas. Once again there comes to the mind the consciousness of some affinity between religion and learning, for are not so many of the world's great Universities sprung from the bosom of some religious centre? A host of names come at random as if to strengthen this thought.

The intangible but vivid feel of learning and scholarship pervades the atmosphere, and creates a yearning in the heart for days of study in these surroundings; here there is, within the richly stocked library, limitless food for the mind and, in the open country beyond the walls, limitless space for meditation. In both of these, after all, is limitless happiness.



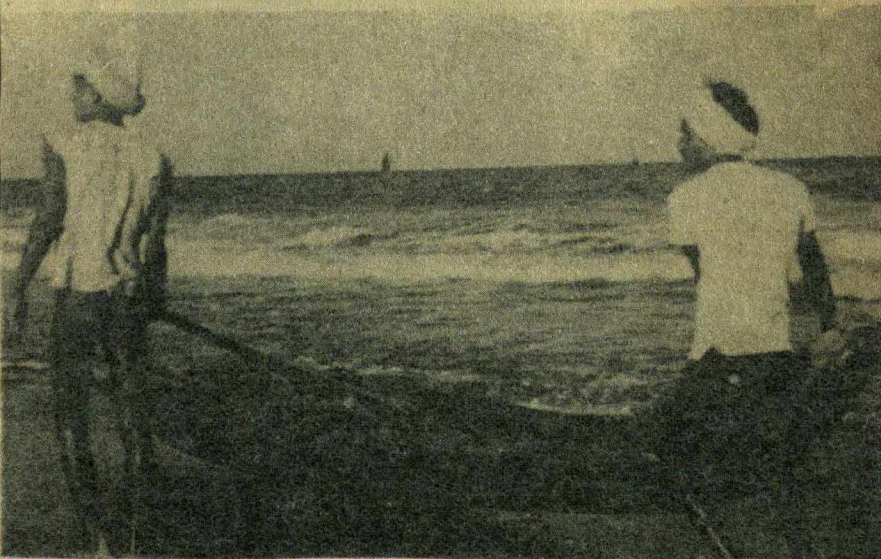
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Chapter I

Above : Logs for the Coromandal Fisher folk's *Catamaran*. 33

Below : Back from the sea ; pulling the *Catamaran* ashore.

Chapter I

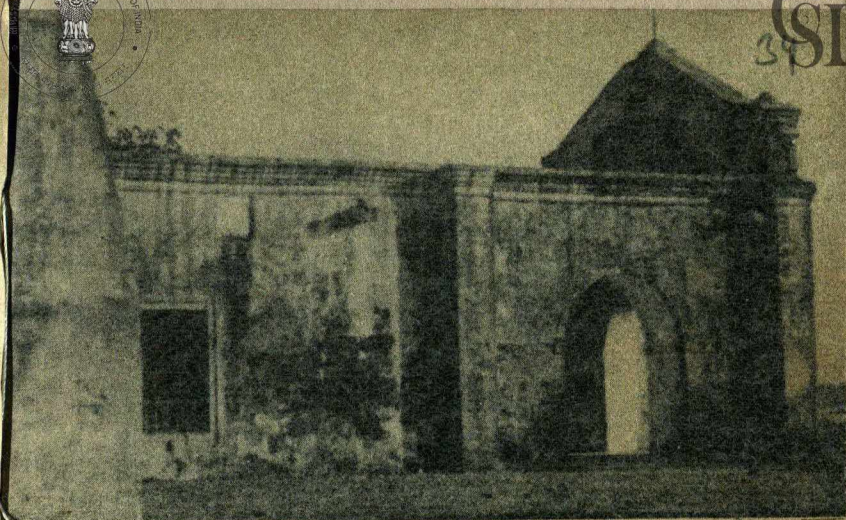




Fishermen setting out to sea in their *Catamaran*



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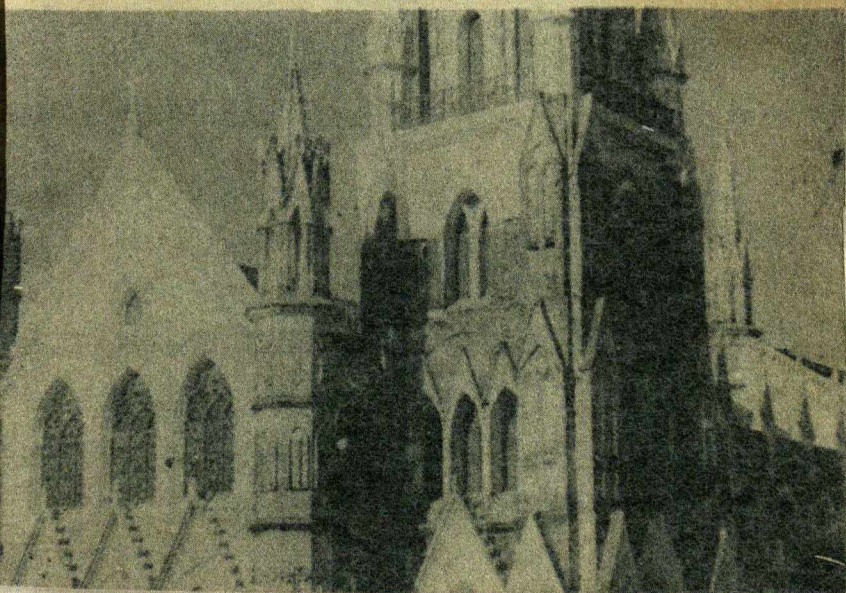


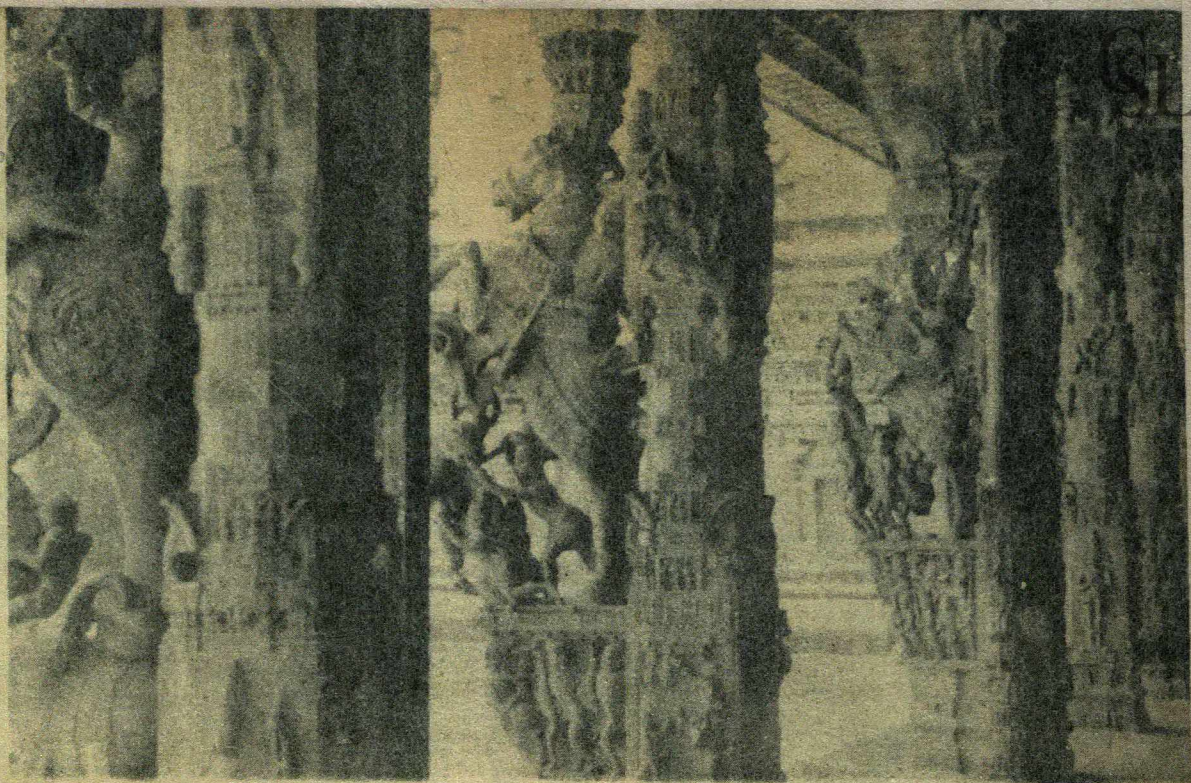
Chapter 1

above : The church built to commemorate the martyrdom of St. Thome.

below : The Cathedral of San Thome built over the original Churen.

Chapter 1

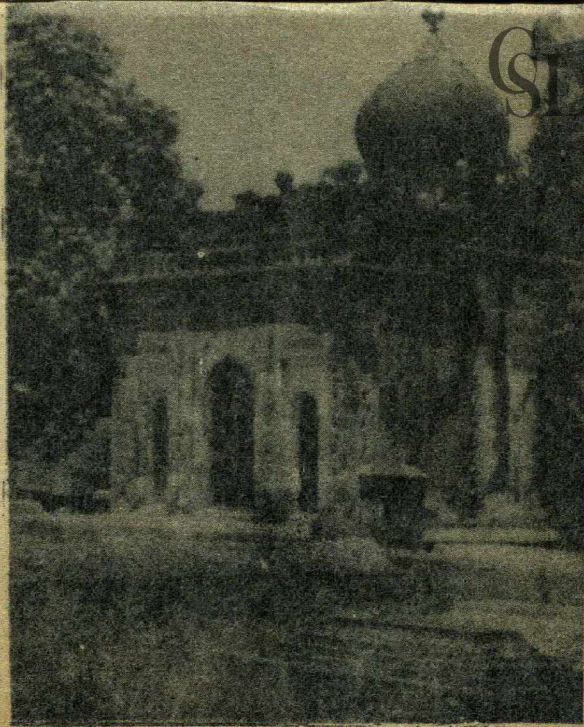
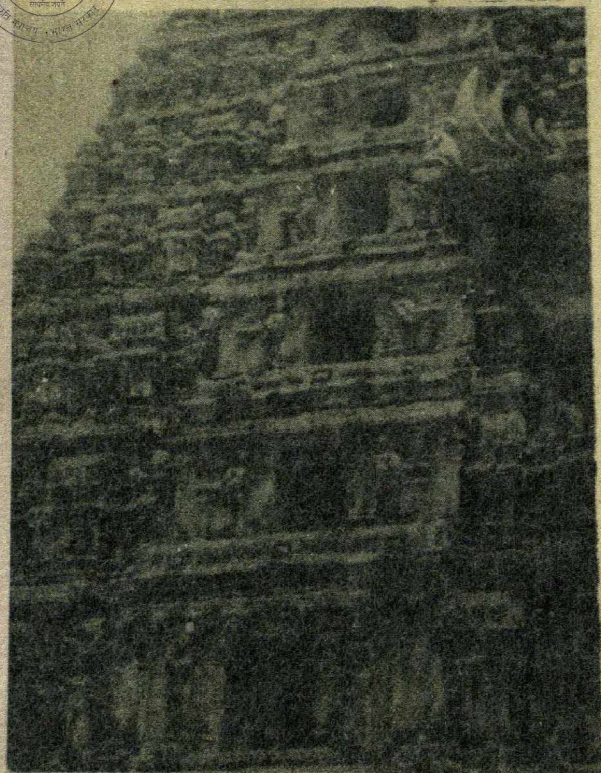






the Tower of the Temple of Vellore, with the
corner of the Kalyana Mantapam.

Chapter III



Chapter I

In the Garden of Tipu Sultan's Begums
the dome of the Mausoleum.

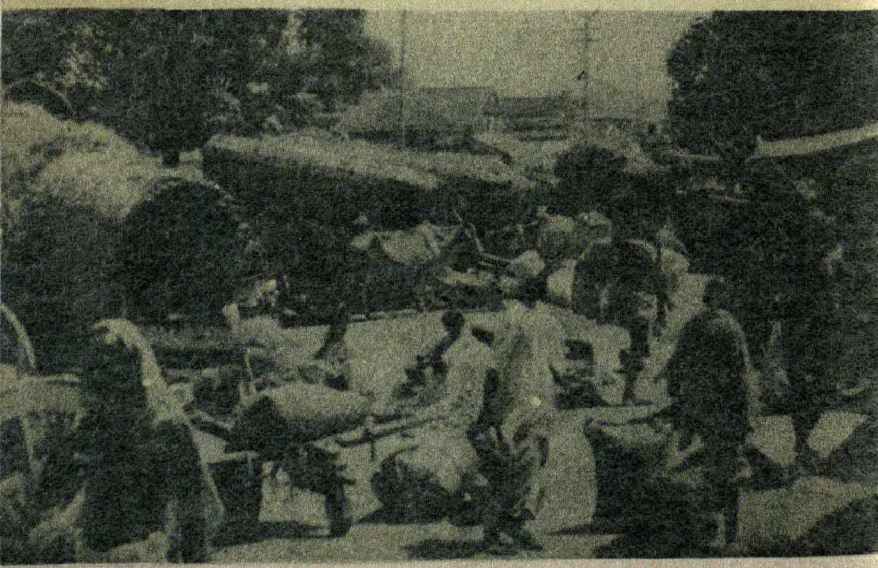
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Chapter III
Above: The old fort walls of Vellore and the moat.

Below: The small but busy weekly market of Vellore.

Chapter III

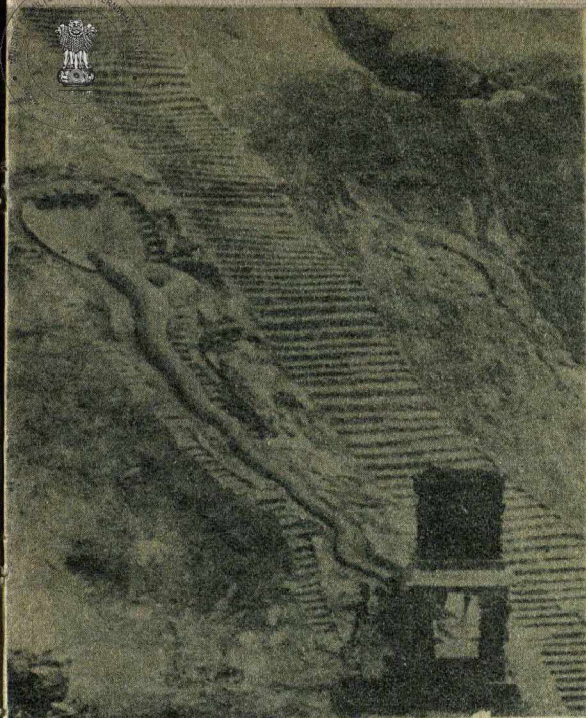




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Left :

The Naga and the
overhanging hill
Tiruchengode.



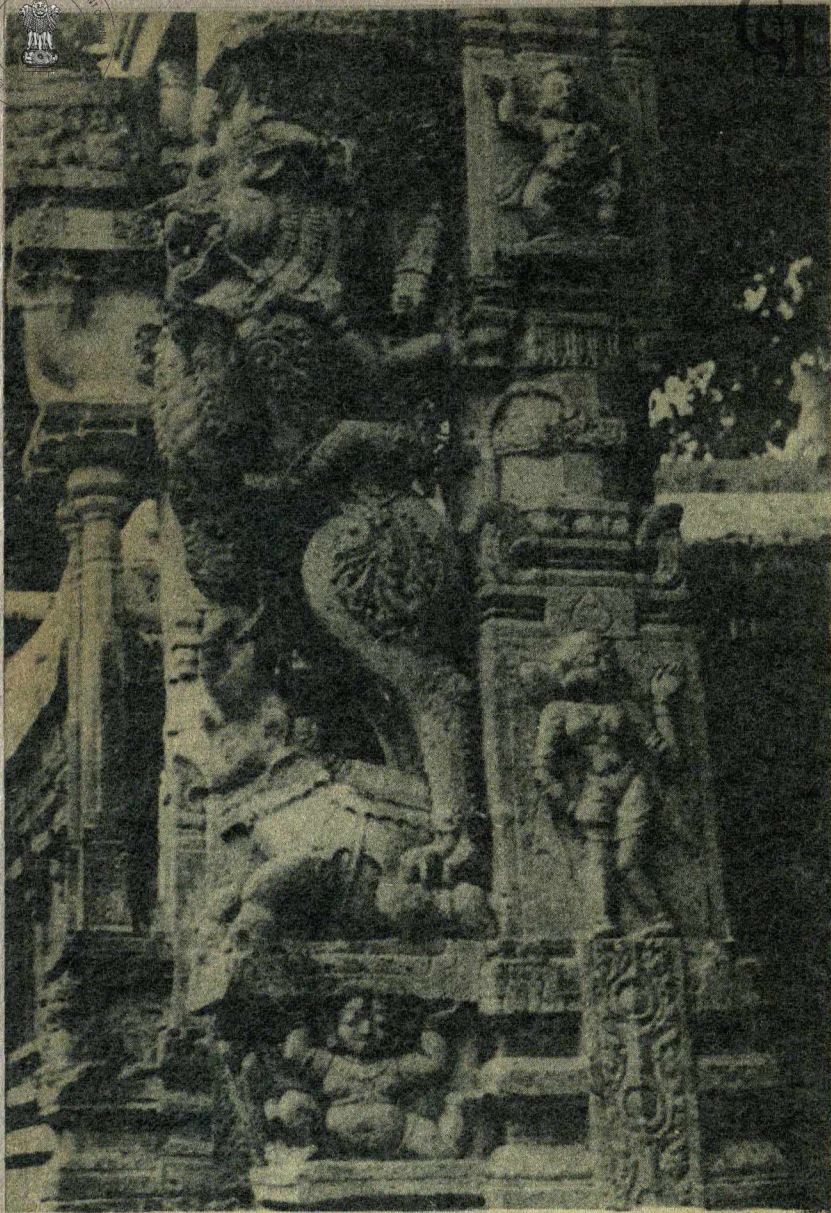
Below :

View of the town
from the first stage
of the climb.

Chapter VIII

Chapter I





Chapter VIII

Sculptures inside the Ardhanariswara temple of Tiruchengode.



A PIECE OF FRANCE ON INDIAN SOIL

In 1674 the merchant-coloniser, enterprising and indomitable François Martin, established a French settlement on some land, fourteen hundred arm-spreads in circuit, ceded to him in perpetuity by Sher Khan Lodi, Governor of Gingee. Locally this settlement became known as Pudukkottai, or Pudukkottai which, corrupted through usage, became Pondicherry of historical fame, over which still flies the *tricolore*.

Pondicherry, during the two hundred and seventy odd years that have elapsed, became one of the most important towns on the Coromandel coast—very nearly, perhaps, what Martin had hoped—only to dwindle, after something of a shuttlecock existence, into the charming little old-world town that lives on today. From its very modest beginning, through its ascendancy and zenith, down to its present condition, Pondicherry might almost be likened to a cottage built with the remains of a palace on the foundations of a hut.

With the far-sighted precision of a man who builds for a prosperous and solid future, François Martin planned his New Hamlet in such a way as to allow for expansion in almost geometric progression; yet, he made it, too, reminiscent of a corner of his native France. One can almost see him drawing the ground plan of his settlement with set square and line, for there must be *netteté* in a man's work; nor must he forget that a constant supply of good drinking water be ensured to his town, so an artesian well connected with a spring some miles away was sunk in the centre of Pudukkottai. Martin encouraged his sixty-odd French settlers to grow their own vegetables and fruit, and breed poultry, and to rear their own milch cattle; he invited weavers and craftsmen of every kind to bring their families and settle in his Pudukkottai; he granted them land for their huts, and exempted them from all taxes for a year. Practical as well as visionary, when Sher Khan Lodi gave him three hundred soldiers for the policing and protection of the town, Martin turned them into as many weavers and thus enlarged the industry of the settlement. By the,



terms of the cession of land, every man was allowed complete freedom of conscience, and within a few years temples and mosques raised their towers and minarets above this "piece of France set on Indian soil."

In those early days, however, the majority of the people lived in thatched cottages on either side of the broad straight roads, for brick houses were few; life was simple, and Martin himself set the example of frugality—frugality that is a national characteristic of the French. Having obtained permission to fortify the town, Martin spent the modest sum of seven hundred crowns on the works, then set himself to building warehouses, bazaars and shops, and establishing fisheries on the Gingee river; on Tuesdays, the weekly market of Pudukkottai drew many thousands of people from the whole neighbourhood. As the years went by and prosperity grew, and brick buildings and residences with it, the founder became governor at last, constructed for himself a governor's mansion; from this he would sally forth in state in his ox-drawn carriage escorted by a gold-braided captain of the guard and twelve mounted men in scarlet uniforms followed by three hundred foot-soldiers. When not required for these state occasions, the foot-soldiers earned their livelihood as dock hands or coolies. So well had François Martin laid the foundations of his settlement that after some thirty years, in 1706, Pondicherry counted a population of about thirty thousand souls. Though the town was to grow in size, and in importance and brilliance, and its markets were better stocked with countless commodities than most towns of that part of the country, its mercantile importance was never very great. Exports and imports were always to remain in rice, painted cloths, and muslins from India; silver, iron, and broadcloth came from France.

From ox-drawn carriages Pondicherry rose to brocaded palanquins and liveried attendants, and from cottages and huts to fine residences inside the citadel, and summer villas on the outskirts of the town along the Gingee river. While many lived in luxury or in the re-created atmosphere of their native land, the governors and their councillors schemed intricate political patterns at the courts of the neighbouring kingdoms. Such were the times that men placed in important positions felt no qualms in yielding to temptations of personal power nicely draped in the vestments of patriotism.



Gone were the simple days of the late seventeenth century, of thatched cottages and soldier-weavers, when Pondicherry's cannons boomed their ceremonious welcome from the imposing citadel to the widow and daughters of Dost Ali Khan of Arcot, and Governor Dumas, no less intrepid and chivalrous than Martin, headed the brilliant *cortège* that was to escort the distressed ladies through the city gates to a palace specially set aside for them. In the wake of the ladies' twenty-two palanquins came fifteen hundred horsemen, eighty elephants, three hundred camels, two hundred ox-drawn carts, and over two thousand pack animals, all of which Pondicherry easily accommodated within its fortified walls. To this formidable train was soon added that of Sabdar Ali, come to thank Dumas in person for the courteous reception and chivalrous asylum accorded to his late father's household. Those days saw, too, the close association of Chanda Saheb and Pondicherry, and the settling down of that luckless Nawab's family in the safety of the French-governed town.

Now, as long as Pondicherry was purely a settlement of merchants, even an expanding settlement, few dangers threatened the town except possible inroads of robber bands, the irregularity of silver supplies from France, or the vagaries of the monsoon. But when political ambition had made of the town the diplomatic workshop, so to say, of South Indian affairs, the city found itself in very real danger. The first military impact that Pondicherry suffered was more in the nature of business rivalry between the Dutch and the French East India companies; when Pondicherry was returned to the French, however, it boasted of a stout citadel which the Dutch had constructed for themselves. They, too, a practical people, did not fail to charge for the construction of this citadel.

The second and subsequent sieges were much more serious; but Dupleix, at the height of his power and popularity, the recipient of high honours from the Imperial Court of Delhi, the ally of the great Subedar of the Deccan, overcame the straits of a spectacular siege by his resourcefulness and personality. Too much was at stake for him, nor did he ever falter in his resolve; the successful resistance to Boscawen was to be used as a stepping-stone for more ambitious achievements; for, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Pondi-



cherry was the capital of a budding empire, and no longer a trading centre in the East.

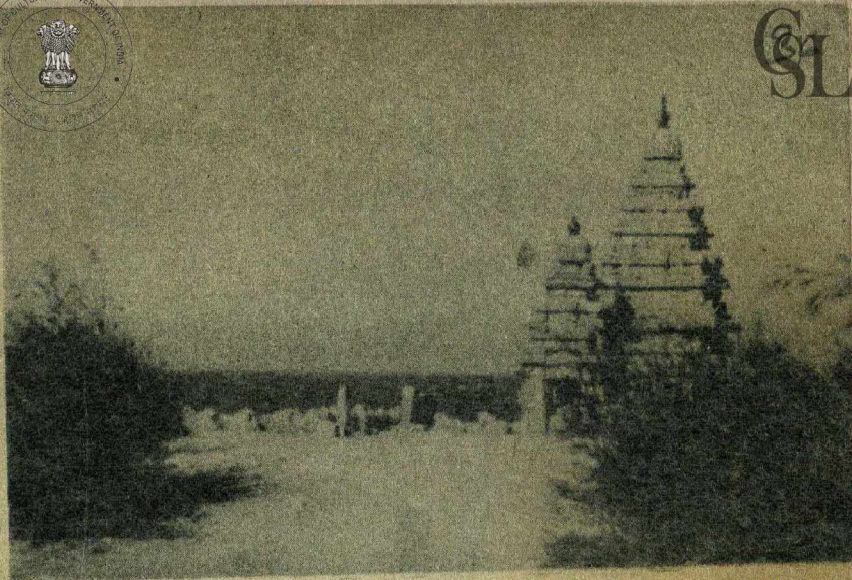
The rapid decline of Pondicherry followed on the recall of Dupleix. This need not have been inevitable had the accent been replaced on commerce rather than weakly maintained on politics. For a moment the fall was stayed by the valiant, though misguided, efforts of Count Lally to retain what he had been given to hold; with neither moral nor material support from the home government, any plans for further expansion or power were bound to fail; and, moreover, interest in eastern affairs had, by that time, completely flagged in France—she had enough troubles of her own. The inevitable followed: internal dissensions and bad government; beset by a tenacious rival, Pondicherry was lost to the French time after time, and its fortifications were razed to the ground in wearisome repetition with each English occupation. And so they have remained after the restitution of the town and its adjoining lands in 1816. With all these vicissitudes, it is surprising how very French in atmosphere the little town has remained; this may perhaps be because it was planned and built with so much sincerity and hope, and thus was impregnated with the genius of the nation that colonised this piece of the Coromandel Coast.

As in the days of Martin the countryside around is green with cultivated fields; just as in those days the peasants' ingenious methods of irrigation which so provoked Martin's admiration, render the land fertile. Under long rows of palm trees the indigo dyers spread out their long strips of cloth; the weavers are busy, and the town goes about its various avocations as though unconcerned with past glories. Broad footpaths down the main streets, and solid drains everywhere at once give character to the town which is commendably free from rubbish. There is also quite a pleasing harmony in the houses with their carved wooden doors and pillars that support enclosed balconies. Everywhere there is that *netteté* which recalls its founder.

The vast Place Dupleix, or Place du Gouvernement—Place de la République, as it was also named at the appropriate period—occupies the site of the old citadel; as it is today, with palm trees and lawns and neat promenades, it might almost be a replica of many such squares on the Riviera. To one side is the Governor's Mansion set in a huge garden and



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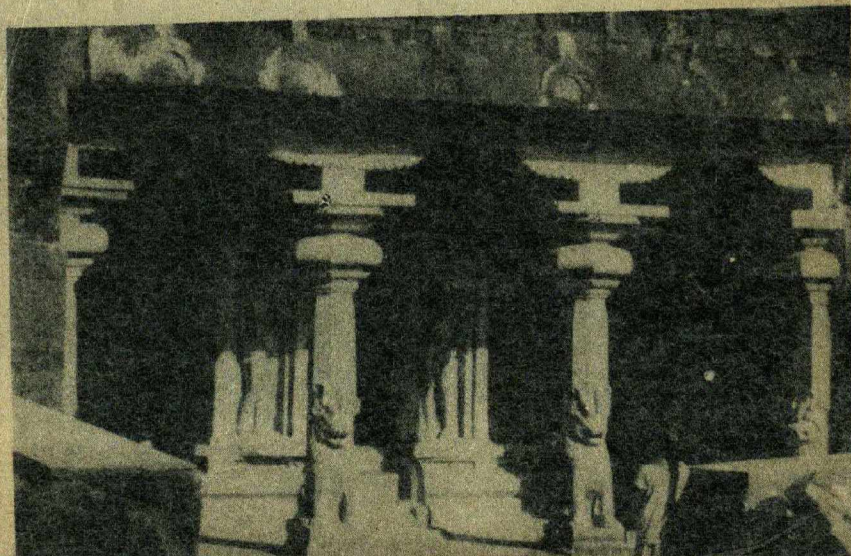


Chapter

Above : The lonely shore temple of Mamallapuram.

Below : Front of a cave temple at Seven Pagodas.

Chapter I





Chapter IV

The stone elephant and *ratha* of Mamallapuram.



half hidden by luxuriant trees ; on the first floor the scintillating glass candelabra speak of the eighteenth century, of lace cuffs and brocaded full-skirted coats. On the opposite side rise the administrative buildings that command attention by their tall sobriety and symmetry. Facing the sea from across the Place is the Cercle de Pondicherry, fronted by an open-air terrace, where the élite of the town, in animated groups round café tables, find relaxation and refreshment after the heat of the day. The eye rests on the statue of Dupleix, standing on a pedestal of carved granite temple pillars, then follows its bronze gaze beyond the tall Vijayana-gar-carved granite columns at the pier-head and loses itself in the immensity of the sea. And the thought comes that, were the statue to symbolise more truthfully Dupleix' ambitions, its fixed gaze should be turned towards the west, where lay the rich territories that he schemed to weld into a French empire—and so very nearly accomplished.

To the right of the pier rises the lighthouse surrounded by the power-house buildings ; the hum and thump of the great dynamos give the illusion of being on board a ship, and the illusion is accentuated when one steps on to the pier that vibrates with the impact of waves breaking against the pillars. The swish of the waves and the strong seabreeze bring the slight intoxication and sensation of unsteadiness that come when first boarding a ship.

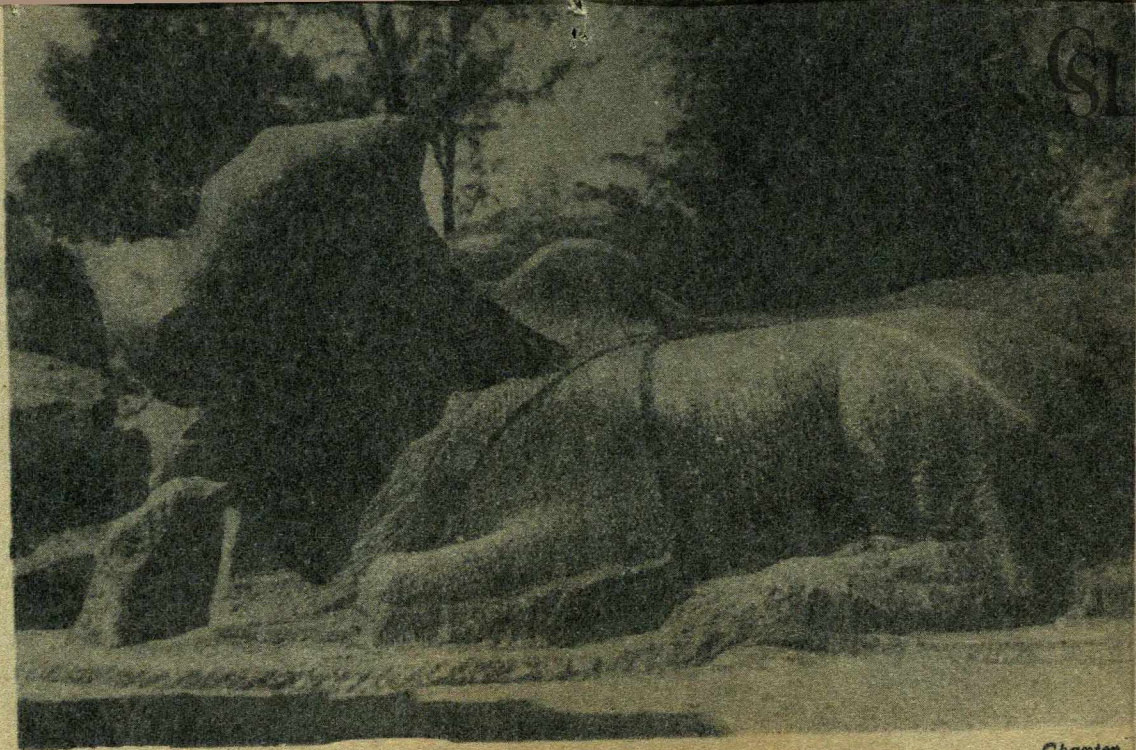
Walking through the town, street names recall historical figures : Rue François Martin crosses Rue Rangapoulle... the same Ananda Ranga Pillai in whose Diary lies an intimate picture of everyday life in Pondicherry two hundred years ago. It is easy for the mind to cast itself back in time, and see, against the living background of today, the events so faithfully recorded by the sagacious Rangappa who would first read Monsieur's trend of thoughts before answering his questions. It would seem almost natural—oneself, of course, out of place—to see a palanquin borne down the street carrying some wealthy Indian merchant of olden times, or some cavalier in skirted coats and powdered wig on his way to a reception in the Governor's Mansion, or a group of roughly assorted naval conscripts from Ile de France gaping at the strangeness of this unfamiliar land. The khaki-clad and blue bonneted policeman indicates that times have changed, just as the minds of men are also apt to change.



TALES FROM THE VOICELESS

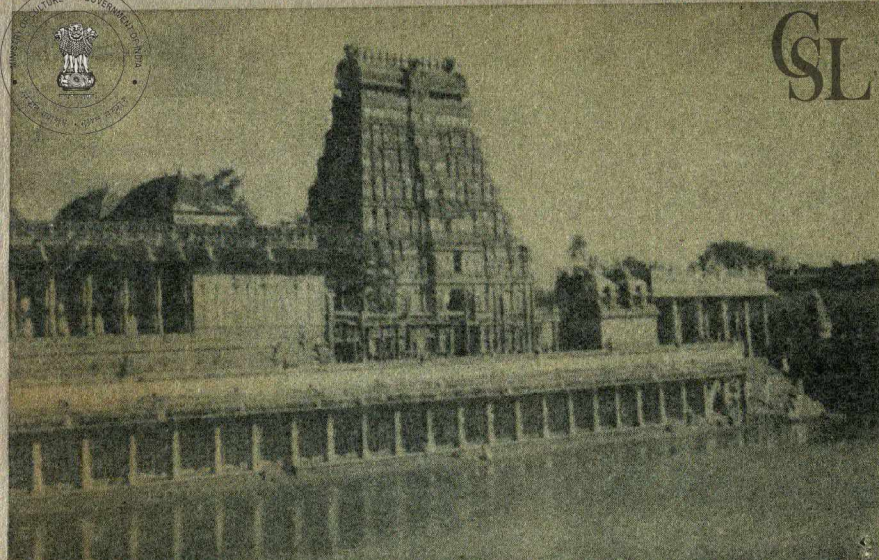
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A question floats up to the *tricolore* that swells so bravely from its tall mast : "Will you, that symbolise those three beautiful concepts of a fine people, come to mean in fact *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* to those over whom you fly?"



Chapter

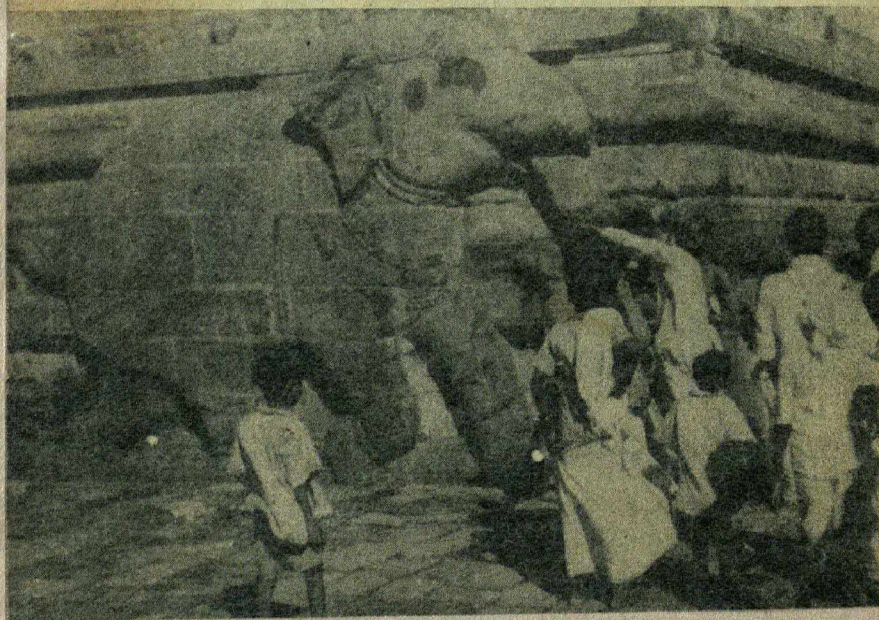
The stone bull—both in this case and that of the elephant the rock sculpture is about twelve centuries old, belonging to the Pallava Period.



Above : The magnificent temple of Chidambaram. *Chapter V*

Below : Scene in one of the temple courtyards.

Chapter V





Left :

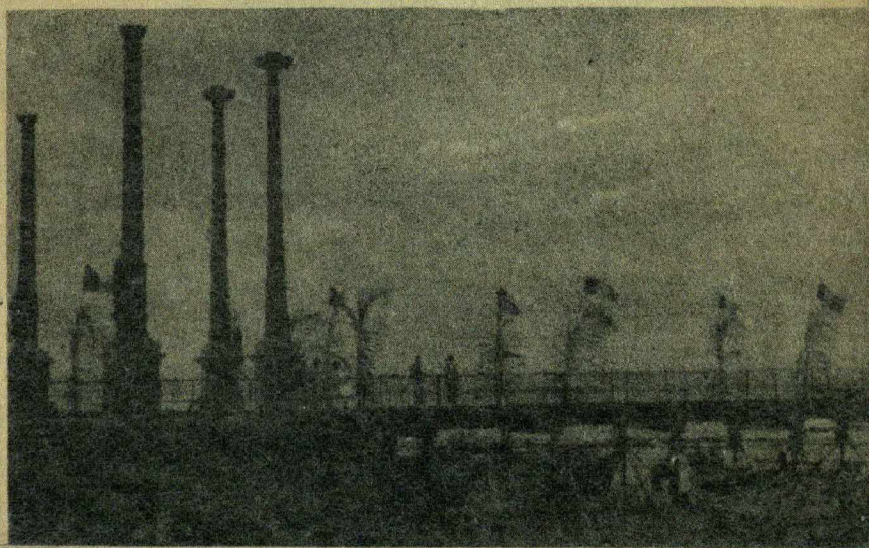
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Dupleix perpetually gas-
ing out over the Bay of
Bengal from the Wid-
Place in Pondicherry

Below :

Pondicherry — the sand-
the jetty, the tri-colour
and the carved pillars from
the Gingee for

Chapter VI

Chapter



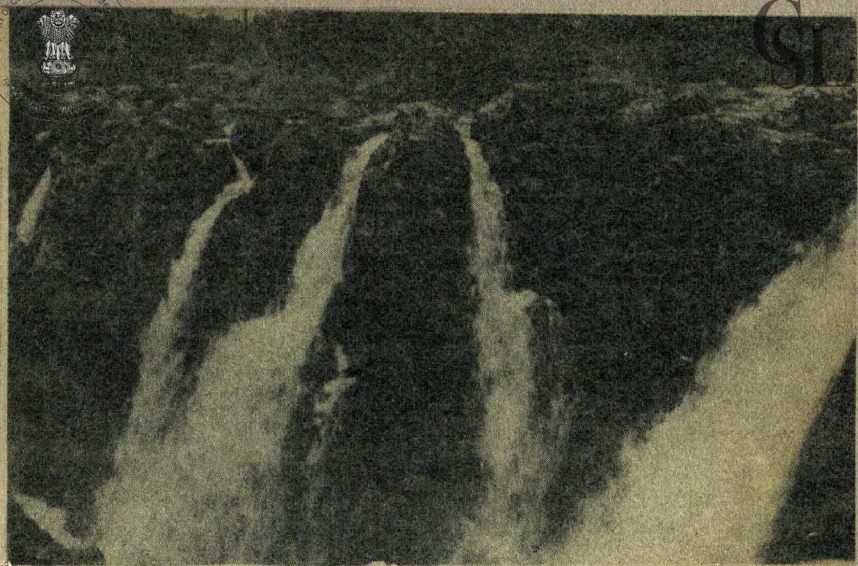


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Chapter VII

A view of the Namakal Fort.



Chapter 1

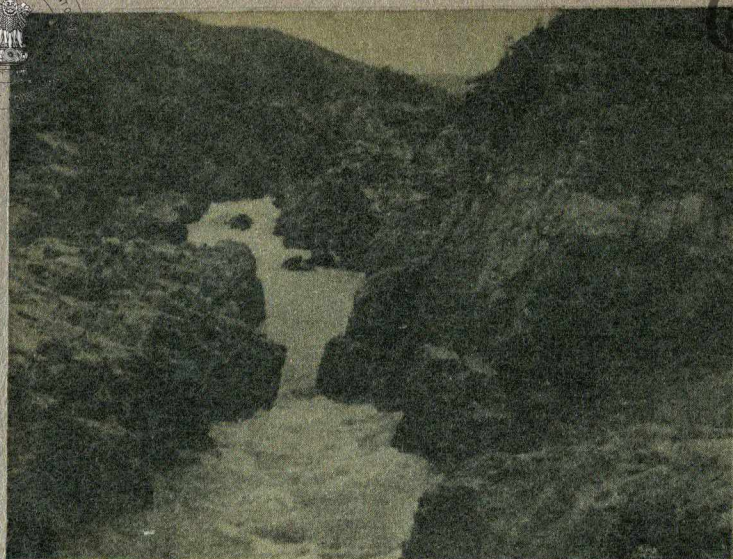
Above: 'Goat's Leap'—The whole river passes through it

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Below: Rapids and Cataracts just above the 'Goat's Leap'.

Chapter 1



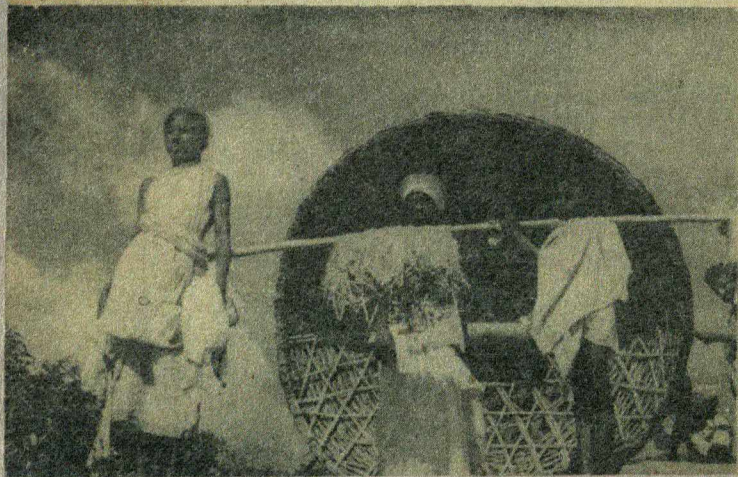


Chapter IX

above: 'Goat's Leap'—The whole river passes through it !

below: The round coracle that plies on the Cauvery river.

Chapter IX





THE STONE THAT HANUMAN BROUGHT

Scorching rays from a June sun beat down on us as we journey from Salem towards Trichinopoly and Tanjore. All this is historical country: known, since the most ancient times, to the armies of the Kongus, Cholas, Cheras, and Pandyas; to the armies of the great Rayas of Vijayanagar and to their Nayaks; a country filled, too, with memories of Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan, and of the East India companies. On the edge of the Salem tableland the road runs below the rugged peaks of the Nainamalai range, and descends into the Cauvery valley. Clouds of thick red dust raised by the wheels of car and bus, even of bullock carts, soon blot out from view the outlines of the hills behind; ahead lies the dreary plain from which rises, abrupt and unexpected, a dazzling mass of white rock—Namakal, crowned by a fort, at whose foot spreads the head-town of this taluk.

At some little distance appears a huge *nama* marked on the hill-side; suddenly the car gives trouble and we swing into a side lane to find out what has happened. A crowd gathers round us, one section giving advice and the other discussing the probable make of the car. Presently the trouble is located and set right; from the advice-giving section of the crowd we enquire whether it is possible to regain the main road through the town, or must one reverse? No, there is no need to reverse; the road through the town will lead back to the main road on the other side of the hill. This fort? It belonged to Tipu Sultan, avers one of the better informed onlookers.

The town of Namakal is pleasing with broad streets laid out at right angles; the houses are solid and square; the *petta* is busy, its markets offer grain and fresh produce grown in the district—surprising discovery after the dreary appearance of the plain at this time of year; water is plentiful in the neighbourhood, people say. The road runs past a wide tank; at the end of a narrower street to the right a beautiful temple lifts its tall *gopuram*; high overhead, two hundred steep feet up, the handsome fort so remarkably well preserved commands



an undisputed view of the surrounding countryside ; skirting the foot of the hill appear new and always beautiful views of the fort from different angles.

Once more on the main road we leave the dry plain behind and enter the Garden of Namakal, whence must have come all that fresh produce, skilfully irrigated from the Cauvery river and rich in groves of plantains and coconuts, areca palms and betel vines ; here, one might say, doth the desert blossom as the rose. The great white rock of Namakal has also disappeared in clouds of dust ; the road runs through quiet and somnolent Musiri, and onwards towards the historical towns of the Cauvery Delta.

The mind, however, stays on in Namakal and endeavours to search its past. What is it, when was it built and by whom ? With what records of brave deeds and stubborn resistance are the pages of its history filled ? The rock and fort look so solid and peaceful where they stand that their sleep may well envelope thrilling secrets.

Namakal itself, the Rock of the Nama, is far more ancient than the fort ; in fact, so tradition has it, it belongs to those happy times when gods frequented the earth as familiarly as their own domains, though the rock is still believed to be the present residence of Vishnu. He dwells, so people say, with Ranganayaki in Ranganathaswami temple up the steep side of the hill. The tortuous and narrow path that leads to the temple is Karkotakam itself, the serpent on whose coils Vishnu reposes. On another face of the rock is Narasimhaswami temple, also sacred to the Lord. At the foot of the hill, Kamalalaya tank, the home of lotuses, which is sacred to Lakshmi as Namagiriammal, is the scene of the origin of the rock.

It is said that Hanuman on his way back from summoning Sanjivi to heal Lakshmana wounded in combat against Ravana, stopped by this tank to quench his thirst ; in his hand was a *saligrama*, the stone that bears the mark of the *nama*, which he had picked up from the bed of the "Ganda-kinadi". Now Lakshmi was doing *tapas* at this time and Hanuman, before addressing her, placed the *saligrama* stone on the edge of the tank ; immediately the stone was fixed to the spot and rose as the Namakal that still gleams today in the brown plain—the footprints of Hanuman are a witness to the incident. And so, to commemorate this visit whose



implications legend leaves to the imagination, a great statue of Hanuman was erected not far from the Namagiriammal-koil, where he remains in eternal worship of the goddess; folk say that his eyes rest on Lakshmi herself, where none can see her in the innermost precincts of the temple.

A curious feature of the rock are the cup-like declivities, or cavities, usually in pairs, that pit the sides of the hill; these cavities retain water believed by the local inhabitants to be of especial virtue, for they will scale the rugged heights to bathe in these cups and to wash their clothes. Two of these cavities are notable for the fine carvings of Naruthuraja Perumal and Narasimhamurthi on their inner walls. For stray pilgrims there are several *tirthams*, too, on Namakal.

As though watching over the safety of the temples and holy spots the massive fort stands towering above them all. Though its exact age is not known, the fort, as forts go, does not appear to be very ancient, for it is in an excellent state of preservation; the manner in which it is constructed with projecting bastions and salient angles, would suggest that it dates from the late seventeenth century. Indeed, one tradition holds that Namakal fort was built by a trusted *poligar* of the Nayak of Madura for his overlord; a second tradition avers that it was an attendant of the Mysore Raja, somewhere between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, who not only built but held this fort. That it was an outpost of the Nayaks of Madura would seem the more probable version, though it might equally well have been an outpost of the Rajas of Mysore in the second half of the seventeenth century. Certain it is that, in the times of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan the fort was occupied by a *qilladar* of Mysore. Tradition, would seem to preserve more faithfully the story of the origin of the rock by divine power than that of the foundation of the fort by human hands.

The only easy approach, comparatively, to this fort is up a narrow path interspersed with steps hewn out of the rock; the secret gate on the opposite face of the hill is so inaccessible and scabrous that it could have been intended for use only in the direct extremity. The solid ramparts that follow, the configuration of the hill are of well-cut rock from the hill itself, held in places with mortar and in others merely by their own weight and accurate fitting; above these are thick brick walls so skilfully pierced in every direction with loopholes that not a



section of the terrain round the fort could not have been swept by a hail of bullets. It would seem that this fort, so stoutly and cunningly built, was meant for a great and heroic role; a formidable obstacle to any enemy, a fort that famine alone or perhaps treachery, could have reduced.

Yet, this role never seems to have been played, for Namakal changed hands with amazing frequency and ease whenever armies marched up and down across this ever much-disputed tract of land; the records of the Mysore wars only tell a melancholy tale of seemingly lost opportunities. It was in Namakal that the much-loved and trusted missionary, Schwartz of Tanjore, was sent to meet Tipu Sultan with proposals for a settlement, but Tipu had left already before the ambassador of Fort St. George could reach the place.

Imposing and handsome, symbol of watchfulness and power, Namakal fort bears no scars of wounds sustained in heroic struggle, nor did its defenders trace a single glorious line in the pages of history. Namakal bade farewell to the last garrison of Sepoys in 1832 and remained to brood, perhaps, over what might have been and those who were men as unflinching as the god who brought the rock on which it stands.

In days gone by, and up to some fifty years ago, the copper-smiths and weavers of Namakal were busy folk; the fine white cloth of superior quality was much prized in Mysore, Bangalore, Salem, and Trichinopoly. But that, too, is a thing of the past, unless it belongs once more to the future in the hopeful times that lie ahead. What has been done well once should never be allowed to be badly done, hence the fine products of Namakal may well find their place again in discriminating markets.



A TALE OF THE HOLY RED HILL

Perseveringly, painfully, up the steep stone steps of the solid rock hill go the pilgrims and visitors in fair weather or foul, under the summer sun or the kindlier warmth of a winter's day. Perseveringly, painfully up past the five-headed Naga carved out of the living rock, and up those sixty fatal steps where every uttered oath becomes irrevocable; still upwards go the people to reach the temple of Ardhanariswara, perched on the lower of the two summits of this Holy Red Hill, Tiruchengodu.

At the top of every flight of stone steps that zig-zag up the hill, the visitor may rest awhile in the *mantapams* especially built there, and let his gaze wander over the vast panorama below, the scale of which becomes smaller and smaller with every stage. On the whole, it is a bleak prospect that meets the eye, though to the east rise the peaks of the Kollimalais; to the north and south lies the plain dotted here and there with small hills, where grow the ragi, cotton, and other food and money crops. To the west stands Sankaridrug, the tallest peak of the taluk and, yonder, the meandering course of the river Cauvery marks the boundary between the districts of Salem and Coimbatore.

In such surroundings where nature does not seem to have fashioned landscapes to quicken the imagination—it is, perhaps that, wearied of harsh reality, man's mind turns more readily to dreamland—how is it that this solitary rock of all those that dot the plain should have been chosen as an abode of God? Well, there is a tale of how it all came about; but that, of course, was a long time ago, before man had detached himself from the powers of Nature.

It so happened, so they say, that Vayu and Naga got into a controversy as to who was the more powerful. Unable to settle so vital a point, it was agreed to hold a test: that Naga would coil himself round Himalaya and that Vayu should try to dislodge him. In the end Vayu won, but the contest had been so terrific that a peak of Himalaya was



wrenched away and hurtled through the air to the spot where Tiruchengode now stands ; on the sides of this peak were blood stains that testify, even today, to the heroic struggle. In memory of this event, perhaps, was a five-headed Naga carved by the steps leading up to the temple, and hence folk also call the hill, Nagachalam.

In more historical times this part of the country passed from one to the other of the various dynasties of Southern India : the Kongus, Gangas, Cholas, Vijayanagar, the Madura Nayaks, and Mysore Rajas ; but, not being particularly strategic or picturesque, the territory that now forms the Tiruchengode taluk does not appear to have had any special history of its own. It may well be, however, that some of the famous Salem steel that went to make Egyptian tools came from here and so, too, that interesting present of steel that the great Porus gave to Alexander the Great. In those times already there was a considerable sea trade between the ports of Malabar and those at the mouths of the Indus.

Speaking of Porus and Alexander and battle array reminds the visitor that close behind him, in the Nritta Mantapam of the temple, prance from their pillars of stone those exquisitely carved equestrian figures so characteristic of the Vijayanagar period. Feeling rested, his mind turns with pleasure on these pieces of craftsmanship, and he notices how lively are the naive lines, how fiery the unsophisticated steeds. Over the ceiling are carved the lovely lotus with dear little parrots sitting on the petals ; all round are carvings that re-tell the tale of the Skanda Purana. The attendant also tells you, proudly, that once there was a clock-work mechanism in the *vimana* above the shrine that dropped *vilva* leaves on the head of the idol ; and he will show with some reverence the quaintly rough sculpture—surely by no descendant of the earlier master-craftsmen—of an erstwhile Collector of the District who, in 1823, caused two broken lintels in two *mantapams* to be replaced. There he stands, hat in hand, as crudely sculptured as, perhaps, his aspect and manners may have appeared to the holy men of the place. In minor shrines, attendant on the deity, are poets and Saiva devotees who have sung of the greatness of this dual man-woman manifestation of Siva.

Once more descending the steep steps, those fatal sixty steps, there comes to mind that story told by one of the Col-



lectors of the District as a true and unaccountable tale. It was somewhere in 1863 that there lived a certain Brahmin in Tiruchengode Town. He decided to get married though he did not possess the means to do so. He, therefore, went to a wealthy merchant for help and the merchant encouraged the Brahmin to get everything ready for the wedding, saying he would meet the expenses to be paid on a certain day. Gaily the Brahmin made his preparations, bride, guests, feast and all, then went to the merchant for the money. To his horror the merchant forswore his promise. Knowing only too well what disgrace and ridicule would be his were he not to complete the marriage, the Brahmin begged and urged and pleaded so much that, in the end, the merchant had him slippered out of the premises.

Seething with anger and filled with the thirst of revenge, the Brahmin took up his *chembu*, bathed carefully in the temple tank, then climbed the hill, up the sixty steps skirting the Naga, with wrath in his heart. He left the Ardhanariswara temple and scaled the pinnacle of Varatha Kal on the topmost peak of the hill, twelve hundred feet above the plain. He went three times round the little shrine, uttering the most terrible imprecations against the merchant in so loud a voice that passers-by in the town below heard him and thronged in the streets, looking up at the amazing scene. Having completed the third circuit, the Brahmin emptied his *chembu* and hurled it down the precipice crying: "May the family of the Gowda sink to perdition even as this *chembu*." He then flung himself, head foremost, down the sheer drop of five hundred feet onto the rocks below the Varatha Kal. Within a week, so it is said, the merchant met his fate as he was travelling to his village: he suddenly threw up his arms shrieking that he had seen the Brahmin, and thereupon went stark mad and died soon afterwards. Such is the tale a Collector of Salem District recounts as true of this holy spot.

But Tiruchengode is certainly more known to the people of the south for its great festival of Ardhanariswara held in May-June, and for the numerous and comfortable pavilions built to accommodate the thousands of pilgrims who throng to it. The town was once a great centre of weavers and grain merchants, and its makers of sandalwood pellets formed an important section of local craftsmen. It would, then, seem fitting to find in the neighbourhood an *ashram* founded on the



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teachings of Gandhiji : service to peasants, rehabilitation of hand spinning and weaving, and the revival of cottage industries.

Life in the *ashram* of Pudupalayam is simple, and the inmates have learnt self-help as well as help to others ; little children come to their lessons in the nursery school, and to learn the dignity of manual labour. The villagers find here a kindly hospital and, in the example of the inmates, stress laid on the self-respect attendant upon doing things oneself instead of detailing less fortunate beings to do work deemed inconsistent with self-assessed personal dignity. Such re-assessment of values, precious to all individuals at all times, must surely be of especial worth in these present times when man seems to be groping for something stable and kindly for which to work ; for a peaceful, hopeful star, one might say, to which he may hitch his waggon. And when the settlement of Pudupalayam will have set the peasants on the way to dignified prosperity, it will indeed have made even more holy the name of the Holy Red Hill.]



CATARACTS OF THE CAUVERY

Flowing eastwards from her source in the Hills of Coorg, the river Cauvery cuts through the State of Mysore and enters the northern boundary of the Salem District in two great leaps. As though rebellious of the taming she has received on her travels, impatient of the bridles placed on her with anicut and dam, the still untamed Cauvery finds her true self again at Hoganakal. Here, untouched by any man-made shackles, free again in undisturbed Nature, the Cauvery tops the rocky plateau in a dozen rapids that speed through channels carved in the rough, jagged rocks.

At Hoganakal, this unaccountable river that has already run some two hundred miles of her course, that has already irrigated thousands of acres of field and has worked a powerhouse, hurls herself, in a wild paroxysm of fierce, free joy, from rocky ledge to rocky ledge into a chasm seventy feet below. In her descent the river casts up clouds of smoke-fine spray that dim the air and make the local folk explain how their river, at this spot, goes up in smoke.

"A roar heralds the river" at Hoganakal; an incessant boom that has come from the dawn of time and reaches forward to the disintegration of the earth, it seems. At the foot of great bastions of water-carved rocks is such a churning and seething of mad waters that the mind reels before the awesomeness of Nature's limitless power.

But the Cauvery is an unaccountable river; for, barely has she roared and boomed, seethed and churned as though to stir the very bowels of the earth, than she squeezes meekly through a gap in the rocks only a few feet wide, a gap that even a goat could span. This is the place that the local people call the "Goat's Leap". From here the river spreads calmly to right and left and becomes a broad and benign purveyor of fertility.

Only a short distance from the chasm where seething waters entice man and animal to certain annihilation, the peasant-boatman can ply his frail coracle in perfect safety.



In a craft made of cane-work stretched over with skin, or hide, and a rude paddle as sole control, he carries his rustic loads from one green bank to the other. Yet, the boatman can never forget where he is, for the ceaseless roar floats down to him on the current and, high overhead, the air is dim with water-smoke.

Hoganakal is a lonely spot. Across the sky-line not a human habitation is seen for hours together; only the lonely herdsman with his vast, passive herds of cattle moves slowly over the hill-side and along the river-banks. Here is a scene as ancient as nomadic man, as elemental as the Cauvery above the Goat's Leap.

To the farther side of the rapids lie thick and untouched jungles. Folk say that wild beasts, even the elephant, approach the Cauvery at this spot to slake their thirst ere she plunges down the rocks. Folk say, and folk have heard tell, but none has dared to sit and watch the secret life of the river, nor the stealthy visits of her companions in freedom.

Where the Cauvery spreads to right and left and flows calmly, as though oblivious of her turbulent mood of but a moment ago, she seems to be collecting herself in preparation for what is yet to come, and her new mood is more serious. In the second part of her course she has yet to meet more dams and anicuts that belong to the most ancient irrigation system in the country; she has to wash past historical towns, capitals of ancient kingdoms; she supplies new industrial settlements that have sprung up to take advantage of her harnessed power; she has to bestow the gift of her water to thousands of acres more before she finds her way to the sea. The country through which the Cauvery continues her run has none of the exhilarating adventure that greets her at Hoganakal; henceforth, she must settle down to a life of self-abnegation, finally to fade into the sea in the utter insignificance of those who surrender their substance for the benefit of others. The fall above the Goat's Leap is the Cauvery's last bid for unbridled waywardness.

Henceforth, as along the earlier part of her course in the State of Mysore, thousands of the river's children await her bounty and live by the gift of water that she so unstintingly bestows; once again will come to her aid, in this holy task, numerous streams and small rivers from heights in the territories through which she flows. It was ever the example



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of the one that inspired the many; it was ever the force of the greater that carried the smaller along with it—and as it is with human beings, so it is in nature.



FROM THE HEIGHTS OF COORG

The disgrace that comes from the theft of an arecanut cannot be wiped out by giving an elephant.

The hand that gives will never feel want.

—(COORG PROVERBS)

"These . . . sons will be great warriors," said Parvati.

—(FROM THE *Kaveri-purana*.)

Morning mists lie heavy over deep fields of high-grown paddy in the broad valleys, and half hide the *devakaddu's* impenetrable thickness. The nip in the air fills the lungs with exhilaration, a slight sharp pain that is also a pleasure. From the ground floats up the damp scent of fertile earth and growth—perhaps one of the oldest, yet certainly the most intoxicating scent that man has ever inhaled.

A pale warm light slowly permeates through the mists; the broad valley reveals the squared-off divisions between the paddy fields; to the far side a double-storeyed homestead takes shape with its outhouses clustered around, its fruit trees, areca palms of tall slender stems and bushy heads, its graceful long-armed plantains. Grey smoke from the hearth mixes with the dispersing mists, and a flood of pale gold brings as it were a smile to the solemn thatched dwelling—this is Coorg.

This is Coorg of forested slopes, still the haunt of wild life; of glades where the farmer folk gather to render thanks for the year's abundant crop, and to dance to the rhythm of drums and the eery wail of huge curved horns; they rejoice that their labours have been fruitful, and in their faith in the soil.

From any of the grass-covered peaks of North Coorg, the whole panorama spread before the eye presents a breathtaking concatenation of rounded hill-top after rounded hill-top, in ever attenuated shades of green that gradually merge into grey-mauve, until the outline of the chain seems to evaporate into the haze of the farthest distance. Over the rounded slopes, herds of cattle wander under the care of men



of calm soul, the herdsmen who, day by day, behold eternity spread out before them in the Western Ghats. Nearer at hand, the valleys are thickly clothed in dark green forests; away to the south the valleys broaden into fields, the repositories of Coorg fertility. Beneath the shade of the forests stretch acres of cardamom; above acres of coffee plantations rise the tall lightly shading trees, while in the broad valleys, some of them many acres in extent, grows the rich rice of the country and the numerous gardens that make famine almost unknown in Coorg. Here and there, girt about by their groves of fruit trees and flowering shrubs, stand the homesteads of the farmers placed in the middle of their holdings; for, it is said in their proverbs that relationship is lost through not keeping in touch, debt is lost by not demanding it, and land is lost by not seeing it. A number of these isolated farms constitute a Coorg village; thus, just as the province is in itself self-contained, so is each farmstead a self-contained unit run almost entirely by the family, itself the unit of the population.

Neither outside influences nor the impact of conquests seem to have done more than touch the fringes of this entity which is Coorg; while the people, as though standing on the shores of history, seem to have gathered from the waves that washed their natural frontiers only those ideas, as it were the foam, which could most readily be adapted to their genius. The Coorgs have remained true to their stock and to their traditions, however thoroughly many today appear to have absorbed western influences and, certainly at first sight, what strikes the visitor is the western atmosphere that seems not only to prevail among the wealthier landlords, but to be so much a part of their upbringing. There is, moreover, the more to confuse the modern observer, a baffling agglomeration of traits reminiscent of diverse peoples in diverse parts of India, which makes an attempt at selecting the trends of history likely to reveal the background against which to account for the modern Coorg even more difficult. Nor is an acquaintance with the customs and traditions so lovingly observed by the majority immediately enlightening; precisely, perhaps, because of this alloy moulded by the people's genius into Coorg lore.

Yet, alongside the self-sufficient and almost, one is tempted to say, self-willed existence of the people, there have been



certain deficiencies that have had to be compensated by importing outside talent and incorporating it, practically unaltered, in their life. Thus, there does not seem to have been any local tradition either of temple or domestic architecture, and Malabar, with its wealth of timber and heavy rainfall, could supply the sort of artisans who would build houses and temples suited to Coorg conditions. Steeply slanting roofs and carved timber have become characteristic of both regions, yet the imported Malabar style has not remained uninfluenced by its environment and has produced temple and homestead with a Coorg *genre*. The distinctly Mussalman character of a few buildings in Mercara can easily be attributed to the imposed influence of the Sultans of Mysore, in the late eighteenth century.

The Coorg homestead, built of local materials and planned to suit the composition of Coorg society, is usually thatched with rice straw and the walls are of stone and solid timber to meet the heat of summer, the damp of the rains, and the cold of winter; the appearance, too, tells of the life of the people, for these homesteads were, on occasion, expected to serve as a sort of fort for the family—family and clan feuds were both numerous and frequent in days gone by; the windows are few and high up, above the reach of eyes and weapons. The heavy entrance door leads through a passage into a square inner area, surrounded by a verandah; this is the main source of light and air for the house and is the common ground of all the family reunions and festivities. Here all ceremonies take place, all receptions, and most important events. On the four sides are the living quarters where each married member has his separate room, and the women their own quarters. The servants and domestic animals occupy the back portion of the house. In the loft, under the slanting roof, are kept the stores and weapons, though these are more for display than protection today.

The house servants are usually Coorgs, but the meaner tasks are performed by a sub-division of a casteless community that would seem to be, traditionally as well as by heredity, closely connected with the Coorgs. It is not improbable that these Holeyas were the original owners of the land before the immigration of the more martial race that was, with the passage of time and various admixtures of blood, to become the Coorgs of history and today; the old inhabit-



ants gave way before the new, but retained their interest and some of their privileges in the land. They not only follow most of the customs and religious practices of their masters, but enjoy certain privileges not granted to other artisans and labourer classes, or even to the definitely aboriginal tribes in the forests; hence comes the thought that they ceded their place to their present masters, but were retained with a measure of consideration. They were, formerly, held as slaves and in a wedding ballad the hero is shown as having "bought" Holeyas to be his servants and to labour in his fields; today, on the larger estates, most of the farm hands are Holeyas closely attached to the landed families. Freedmen or slaves, the Holeyas have not abandoned their traditional masters, and it is they who usually wend the huge semi-circular bronze horns or play the smart intoxicating rhythm on the slim barrel-shaped drums that always accompany singing and dancing at all Coorg celebrations.

The situation of Coorg farmsteads is characteristic of Coorg life and of the configuration of the country: they stand usually on the lower slopes of the nearest hill-side, overlooking the broad valleys, for these were too precious as fields to be used as building sites.

Characteristic, too, of the people's tendency to glean from various cultures is the Coorg dialect which has no script and no literature, though it does possess a considerable body of folk-lore, wise sayings, and traditional songs for the important stages of a person's life. The dialect contains elements from all the languages of South India flavoured with the peculiar Coorg accent, and it is written in the Kanarese script, most probably on account of the long-standing connection with the Kanarese territories lying immediately to the east and north. Possibly, too, is it on account of the considerable Jainic influence that pervaded a large part of the country until about the twelfth century; remains of Jainism have been found over most of inhabited North Coorg.

And it would seem to follow naturally, too, that a people of warrior-farmers and farmer-warriors, and of primitive hill-folk should have developed no crafts or industries of their own, even among the women. Life must have been too full with the alternating avocations of husbandry and guerrilla, interspersed with family or clan feuds so typical of hill-dwellers, to allow for the practice of handicrafts, much less of commerce.



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The fact that such necessary members of society as skilled artisans and traders came from the neighbouring territories may partly account for the present composition of the Coorg dialect, not to speak of that of the population.

Today, a group of Coorg men at their daily tasks displays nothing but a somewhat surprising, not to say disappointing, monotony of western clothes, though some of the older generation still wear the Coorg head-cloth, tied closely to the shape of the head with one corner hanging over the nape of the neck. The women, mercifully, have retained their most distinctive manner of wearing the sari which gives them freedom of movement; the fullness coming from the group of folds at the back swings attractively to the motion of their unhampered gait. But it is during festivals and at clan meetings that the national attire both of men and women marks them out as a different community, and affords a glimpse into older times. From the family chests emerge the braided turbans—rather similar to those of the lowlands—and the dark-hued or white *kupsas*, the long coats crossed well over the front and with three-quarter sleeves, somewhat reminiscent of the *sherwani*; round the waist is wound a length of brocade or braided cloth through which are inserted the short dagger and long broad cutlass worn by most hill-folk, and silver chains holding bunches of miniature silver instruments, now mere symbols of what a Coorg of olden times had to carry with him for his life as a farmer-warrior. Above the V-shape of the neck and from the three-quarter sleeves appears the whiteness of the shirt, which gives the costume much elegance and *releve*.

Against this predominantly dark background of masculine attire stands out the gaiety of the women's clothes; silk and brocade set off to advantage by the full panel of sari across the back and almost down to the heels; the long-sleeved blouse, and the separate veil tied closely round the head, then hanging gracefully over the shoulders, together with the generally comely features and the self-confident demeanour, all make a colourful, gay, and animated scene. There is a puranic account of how the women of Coorg came to tie their saris in this special way, but it is not convincing, even denuded of its legendary coating, and it probably aimed at lending a religious or Brahmanic sanction to a utilitarian cause.

In fact, most Brahmanic influence is at a discount among the Coorgs, who generally officiate at their own religious cere-



monies, and tend to resent priestly intervention between themselves and Divinity. The very *Kaveri-purana* that takes the origin of this people back to mythological times, and relates the purpose and birth of the country's most celebrated river, arouses much indignation in many a patriotic heart. Be it said for the *Kaveri-purana*, however, that, fantastic as it may read at first, it was not impossibly a response to the simple hill-folk's desire at some distant period for a recognised ancestry. It may also be that, when Brahmanism began to infiltrate into the remoter regions of the south, the learned men who found themselves among the rude hill-folk may have endeavoured to make their legends and allegories more acceptable and assimilable by giving them local nomenclature and topography, or giving classical polish to primitive lore. One is reminded, here, of the migration of the Panchatantra from its native land towards the western world, being clothed successively in the garb of the peoples through which it passed on its way.

The one place in Coorg where Brahmins have established themselves is precisely at the *Talakaveri*, the source of the river which is, of course, a place of pilgrimage for the whole of India. None of them are Coorgs, however—or it would perhaps be more correct to say that no Coorgs are Brahmins—and their sphere of influence ranges from the shrine of Kaveri and the temple of Agastya to the village of Bhagamandala, at the foot of the three-mile climb to the source, where the river meets her first tributary. The big yearly festival of the Kaveri takes place after the rains, the Kaverisankrama, and celebrates the release of the maiden river from Agastya's earthen pot and her overflowing down the hills towards the plains. Bhagamandala is a most important station on the pilgrim route, and it is here, says the *purana*, that the force of Kaveri's loosened waters pushed the pleats of the women's saris round from the front to the back, and this happened to the womenfolk of the divinely begotten son of the first king—very long, long ago when the Rishis inhabited the heights of Coorg.

What happened after that in this happy land remains obscure until about the fifth century of our era; and even then, those records on copperplate and stone that have been found reveal, when pieced together, little more than a patchwork story for some twelve centuries. The story, however,



shows that a number of dynasties from kingdoms lying to the east and north, notably the Gangas and probably the Kadam-bas, apparently extended their sway over a part of Coorg, principally the south and as far north-west as the *Talakaveri*, leaving the hill fastnesses to the west and north almost untouched. Since early times, then, comes the connection between the territories now comprised in the Mysore State and South Kanara. Yet, despite its proclaimed rulers, Coorg maintained throughout an undoubted semi-independence, as is suggested by the early mention in inscriptions of the forty-foot *kadangas*, or war-trenches, that the mountaineers carried over hills and through forests, down ravines and even right round peaks, the better to secure their country against intruders.

In those early times, most probably, those weird huge horns of copper with their eery wails that are heard today only on festive occasions, sounded from *nad* to *nad* as a warning of approaching danger. Then did all the farmers become guerrilla fighters taking advantage of every accident of the terrain they knew so well, to harass and discourage any audacious intruder. These, in all probability, confined their threatening moves to the lower eastern slope and the wider valleys to the north, and were content to demand tribute in elephants and paddy, and accept the nominal allegiance of the hill people.

During these centuries must have taken place the crystallisation of the people into a distinct community, for by 1174 the word *Kodagu* as applied to the Coorgs as a people, appears for the first time in an inscription, which records the mustering in South Coorg of all the *Kodagu-nads* to assist a local king against an unwanted Hoysala general. One of the tentative etymologies of the word is the Tulu and Kanarese for "mountain region" which, though apt, has not yet been proved.

Coorg was, most probably, one of those border states that paid tribute to the Vijayanagar Rayas; it may even have come under more direct authority, for it is one of the few places where the Vijayanagar system of administration still forms the basis of the present system. These may also have been the hilly tracts to which some of the first Muslim generals in the south sent their detachments in pursuit of chieftains and kings who eluded the paying of the demanded



tribute. There are several references to the hilly regions in which these princes sought to avoid contact with the invader.

After the fall of the Vijayanagar empire, when its component parts were one by one proclaiming their independence, Coorg became the target of Mysore arms and, in 1644, the last Raja of the Changalva dynasty, known in Coorg for some seven hundred years, fell in defence of his ancestral fort. The country, however, was not annexed to Mysore, and very soon a Kanara prince, who may have been connected by blood with the fallen Changalvas, settled in the northern districts and founded the line of Haleri Rajas, the last dynasty to rule in Coorg.

The new sovereign had come as a Lingayat priest, but gradually extended both his spiritual and temporal sway over the whole of the country—probably the first time this had ever been done. The Lingayat dynasty of the Rajas of Coorg remained in power, except for the usurpation by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in the late eighteenth century, until 1834 when, in “consequence of his misgovernment, the Raja was deposed by the Resident in Mysore, to whose notice complaints have been brought”; today, this is popularly interpreted as being by the wish of the people. The province, probably in accordance with the Doctrine of Lapse, was annexed to the East India Company.

It is a strange thing that the Coorgs seem to have submitted willingly to this “foreign dynasty”; perhaps the caste-free background of the Lingayat sect suited their temperament—one of their marked traits is the essential equality between man and man within the clan; but the Coorgs had to pay dearly in suppression and misery for their loyalty to the Rajas. Their acceptance of the gradual change from people's rule through the heads of the clans to absolute despotism is difficult to explain, albeit the change was gradual; the despotism was at first well organised and benign enough, but it deteriorated with the stock of the ruling house, into the worst possible tyranny, if one is to believe contemporary accounts. Unfortunately, most of the records that might have shed so much light on this interesting period of transition were destroyed by order of Tipu, as a part of the cruel vengeance he exacted on the Coorgs after their second rebellion against his invasions and their resistance to his



agression. Having deported and forcibly converted thousands of Coorgs, he supplanted the exiles by his Muslim followers whom he enjoined to eradicate the Kodagu race; likewise he caused the destruction of many a farmstead. It is characteristic of the people, however, that no sooner was Tipu Sultan broken than the surviving exiles trekked home from Serinapatam and were re-admitted into the Saivite fold of their native land.

The effects of that period of history and of the last Rajas' *régime* of executions were still felt towards the middle of the last century when the Coorgs, though the dominant race, formed only one-sixth of the total population; the rest of the people being primitive tribes and sub-divisions of casteless communities. This proportion probably differed considerably from that of older times, and there does seem, today, to be a tendency to re-establish the former balance, for the community shows signs of being once more in the ascendant.

Certainly, there does not appear to be either depression or demoralisation among this sturdy people whose neat homes kept so pleasingly clean tell of hard work and self-respect, while the traditional hospitality in even the poorer homes gives an impression of relative prosperity. The land is theirs and the land is fertile and, when the young generation has outgrown the momentary glamour of city life and the attraction of government employment, Coorg will welcome its sons back to the rich lands and look forward to an indefinitely prosperous future, perhaps far surpassing anything known even in the good old days.



A LOST PEPPER PORT

This side of the bridge is British territory, that side is French. Actually, the division is purely academic, for it is the self-same bridge that carries you across a most delightful river from one territory to the other, and mere fancy, surely, decides the fishing boats of classical lines to tie up at this bank or that to compose a perfect picture of sunny peacefulness and contentment. Down the main street of Mahé such notices as *Gendarmerie*, *Ecole de Filles*, *Travaux Publiques* seem to claim that this is a different land and not just another section of the Malabar Coast; and it is true that, quite apart from the notices in French, there is perceptible an atmosphere different to that on the farther side of the bridge.

Farther on, a broad grassy bank sloping to the edge of the river leads to the Mansion of the Administrateur, and a few shady trees, a small square of greenery surrounding the bust of France's Marianne set on a metal pillar, all make a nice little park from where the eye may wander upstream along the palm-bordered banks of the river and the fishing boats swaying at anchor, or slide across the expanse of the Arabian Sea towards the west. A plaque at the foot of the pillar states that the bust of Marianne was erected in memory and to the glory of the youths who fell during the French Revolution of 1789. There are benches around where one may muse on such things as the passage of time, or the unchanging aims of human endeavours, and on their persistent failure.

The massive and robust Mansion of the Administrateur that stands on the rocky shore braves the direct and unhampered fury of ocean storms; facing the sea, a glass-encased verandah running the entire length of the house at once gives it a peculiar character, and a fleeting perception of that technical division of the bridge crosses the mind. The spacious rooms with their elaborately carved furniture tell of wealthier and more important days, when the melancholy echo of the occasional footfall had never yet been heard. But once,

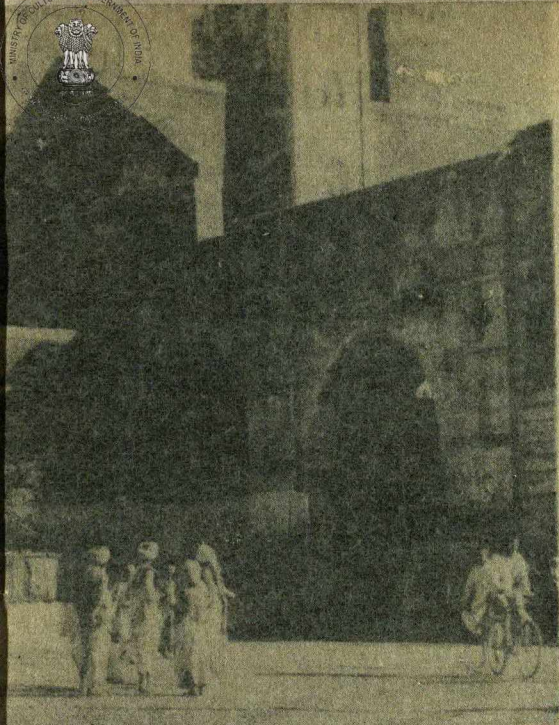


Mahé bustled with the noise and activity of eighteenth century trade and strife.

The story of Mahé—simple in outline, intricate in detail—is a commentary on the workings of French colonial policy two centuries ago; a policy, to quote the opinion of a French historian, that demanded the most brilliant results from the least financial expenditure or moral support. But the special interest of this story lies in that the purpose of the settlement shifted, by the force of political circumstances, from being a potential centre of extensive commerce to being a point of national honour. No wonder that today a deep melancholy floats softly over Mahé; up and down the pretty little sunken roads with their flights of moss-grown steps, and up those dear quaint old oil-lamp posts at odd corners, none of them quite straight and, surely, more useful in the spirit than in the fact.

Down to the second decade of the eighteenth century, one of the very insignificant but very conveniently and charmingly situated little ports of the Malabar Coast was Mayyali at the mouth of a river of the same name. The port counted some hundred odd merchants who traded in coconuts, oil, copra, local cloths, and sundry other goods of local manufacture and demand; this port belonged to a prince whom the Europeans of those days called the "Bayanor," a word which, so it is said, represents a transcription of the Malayali title, *valunnavar*, or ruler. This ruler, in common with many a fellow ruler of those days and those parts, saw the means of increasing the State revenue by granting a monopoly of the very considerable pepper crop of his domains in return for a suitable export tax. One or another of those European traders who professed such eagerness for the purchase of pepper would be sure to accept the Bayanor's offer.

Both the Dutch and the English refused the offer because they already had large enough interests, the one in Cochin, the other in Tellicherry, and both in Calicut. The French, however, who had nothing but an insignificant little lodge in Calicut, hailed the offer with enthusiasm and set out at once to pay their respects to the Bayanor in his capital and conclude a trade agreement with him. In addition to the export tax, the French Factors promised military support against the Bayanor's possible enemies—a clause over which Pondicherry pursed its gubernatorial lips—and asked for Mayyali as their headquarters; the hillock overlooking both the



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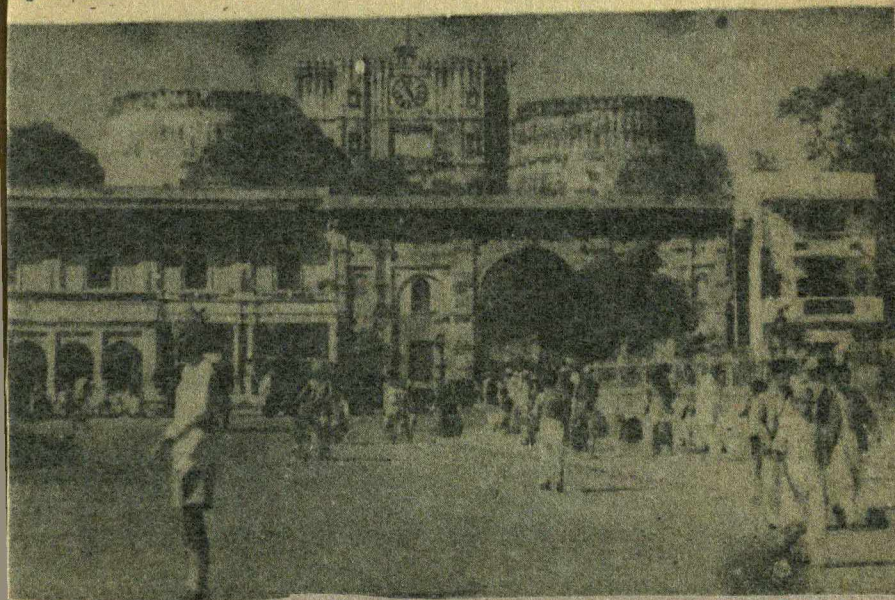
A Gateway into the
City of Ahmedabad.

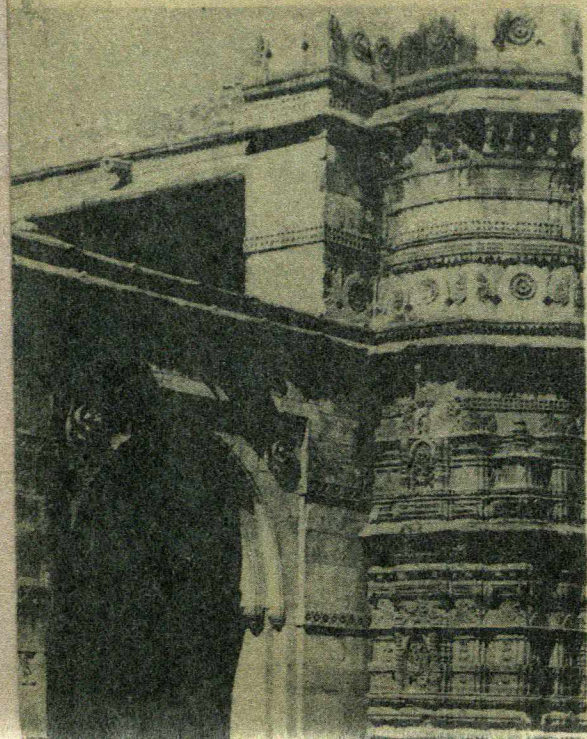
Below :

Old Citadel faced
by the new Station.

Chapter XV

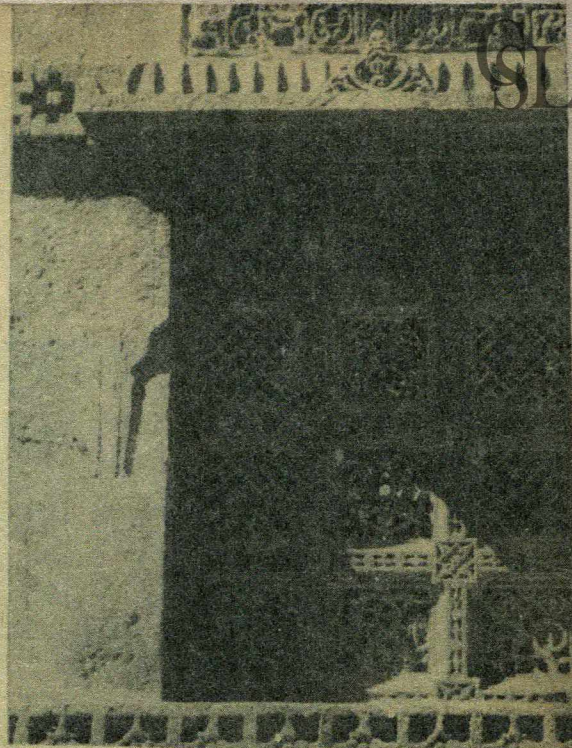
Chapter X





Decorations in Ahmedabad sultanate Architecture

Chapter XV

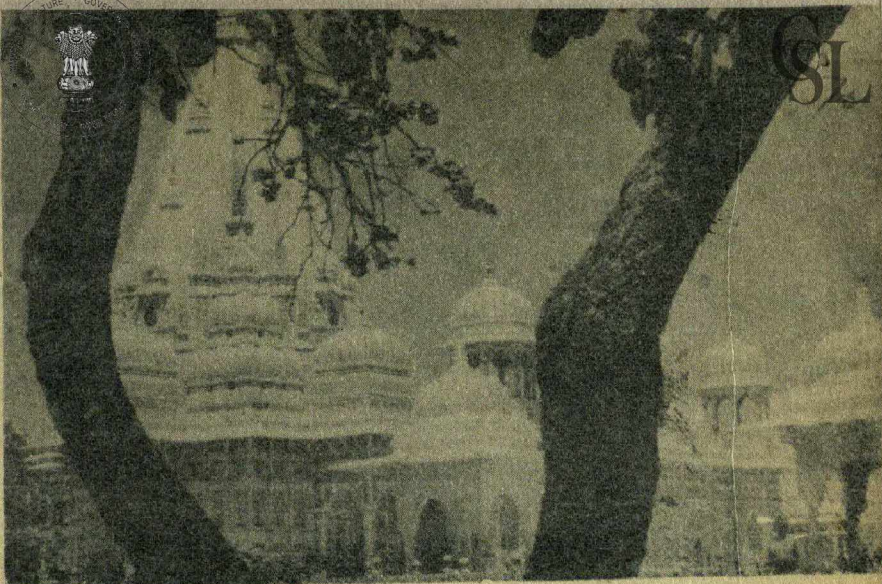


Chapter

A fine example of Ahmedabad zari work in stone



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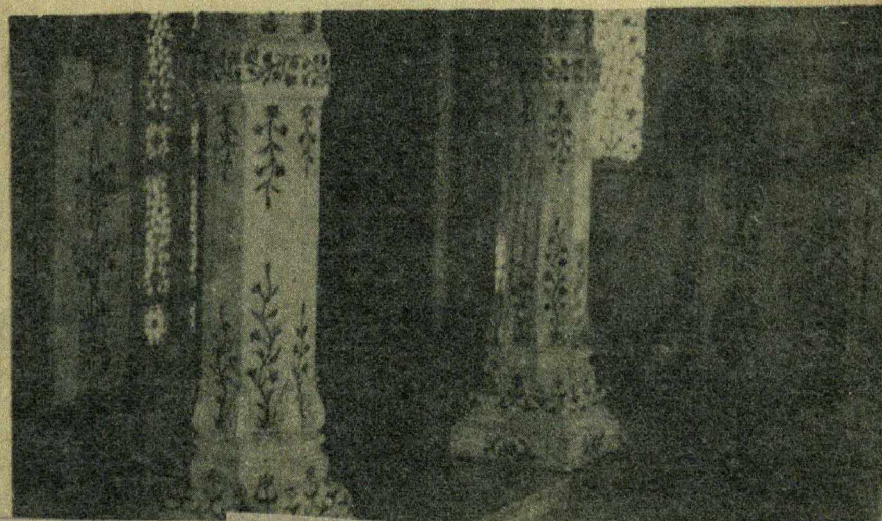


Chapter X

Above : The Shivpuri Mausoleum of the late Maharāja.

Below : Richly decorated marble inside the Mausoleum.

Chapter X





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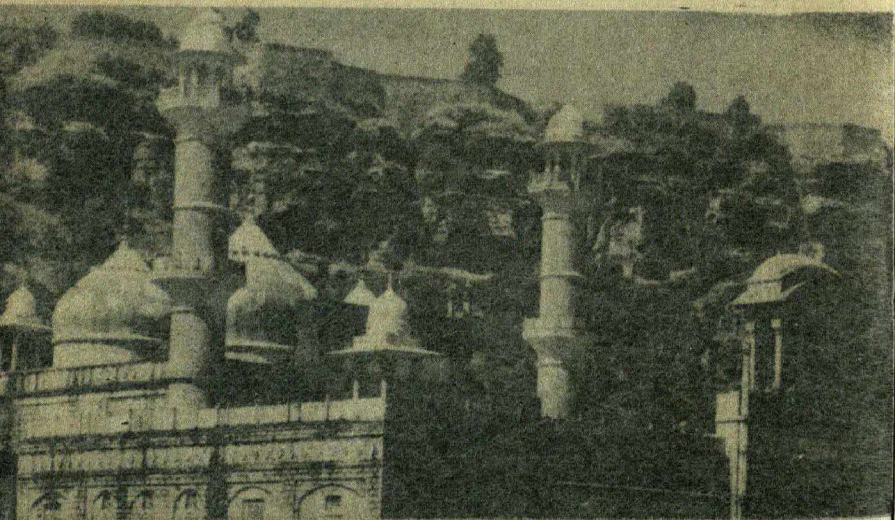
The upper portion
of a gateway of the
Fort of Mansingh

Below :

Every faith has its
shrine in the main
park of Gwalior

Chapter XVI

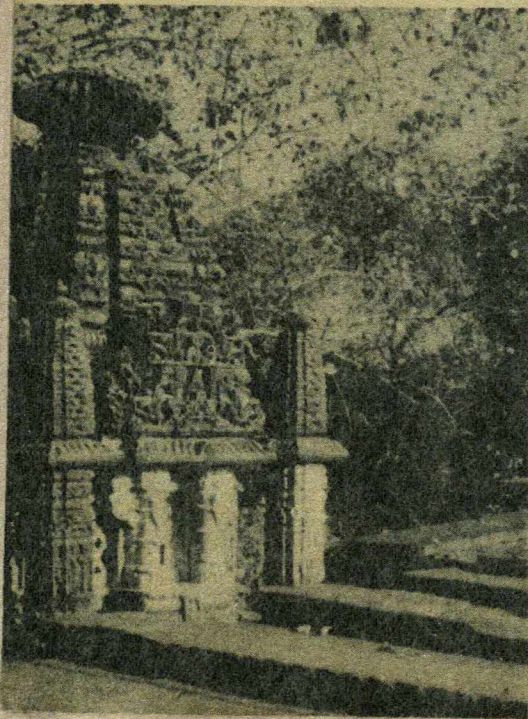
Chapter XVI





portion of the roof of the Suruwaya
Math with the tiny shrine.

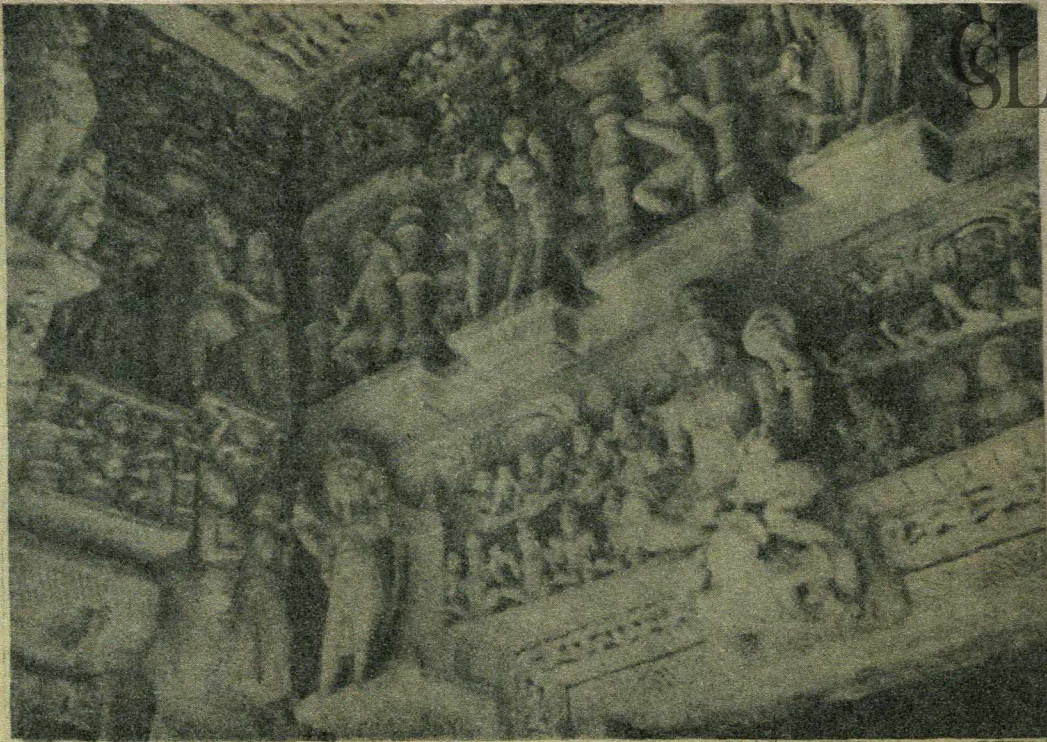
XVI



Chapter XVI

A Capital and naga crown within the
fort walls of Suruwaya.

7



Chapter XV

Sculptures inside one of the temples of Suruwaya, even
the ceiling is alive with figures.

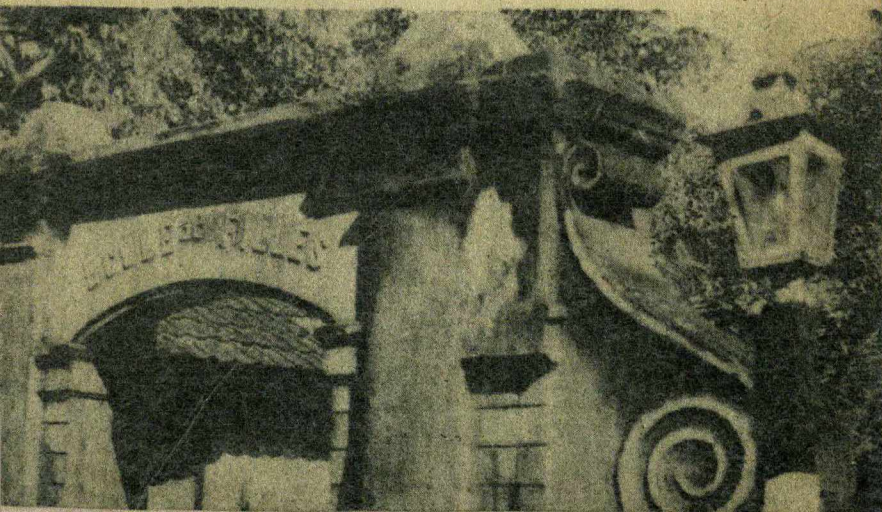


65 Chapter X

Above : Amidst palms a typical house of the Malabar coast of Mahe

Below : A girls' School, a lamp-post and a dear old world atmosphere.

Chapter X.





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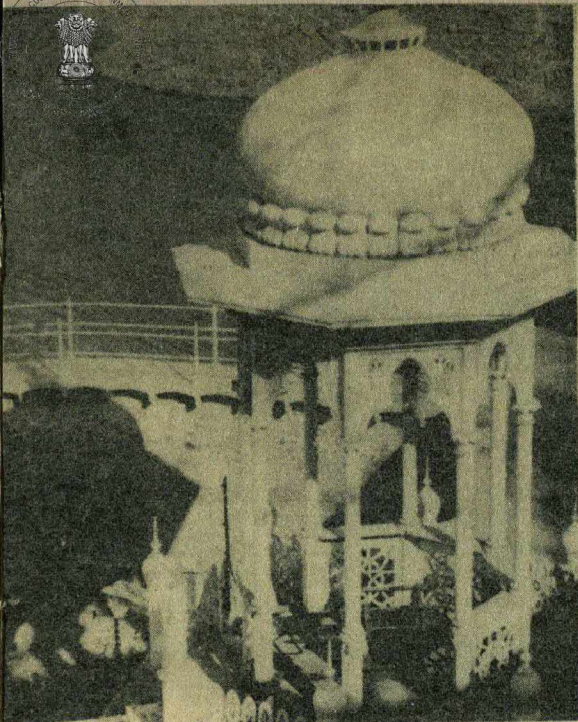
Chapter XII

Above : The tank near the Rama Temple; typical Malabar houses are seen on the farther side.

Below : The ruins of a one time fort behind Tellicherry. In the distance rise the Western Ghats.

Chapter XII





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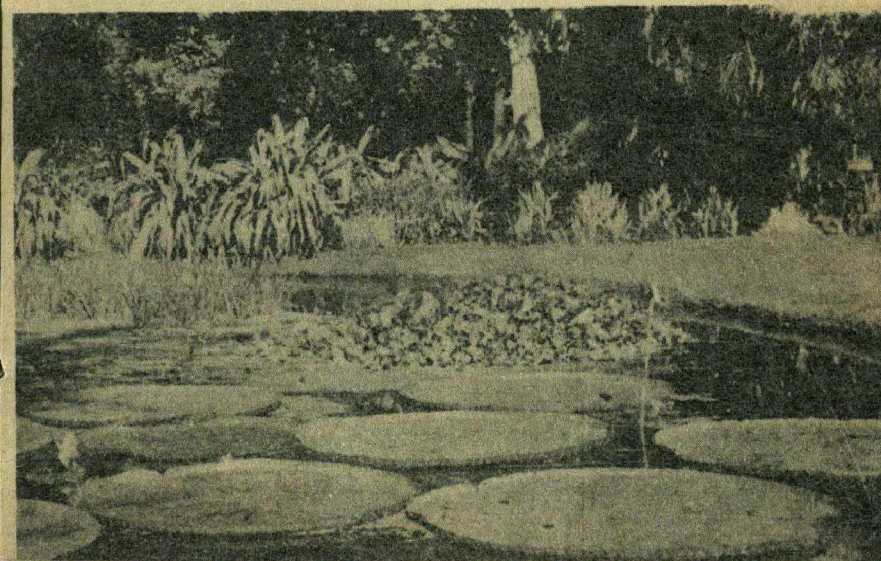
Vihar Lake — one of the water-supply centres of Bombay.

Below :

Peace and beauty in a corner of the Victoria Gardens.

Chapter XIII

Chapter XIII





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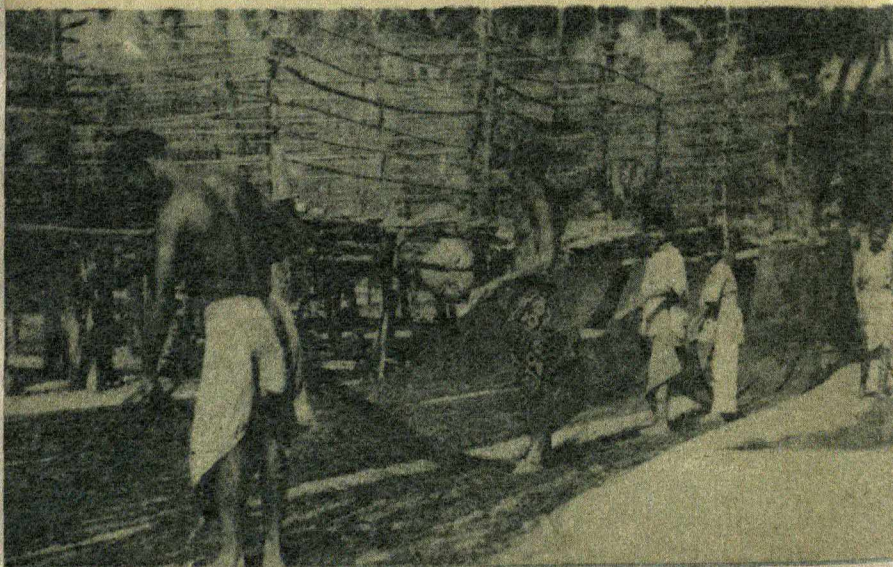
Woman hanging up
Bombil fish to un-
dergo the process
of becoming 'Duck'.

Below :

Koli fishermen of
Bombay cling to age-
old practices of
work and dress.

Chapter XIII

Chapter XIII





Chapter . X

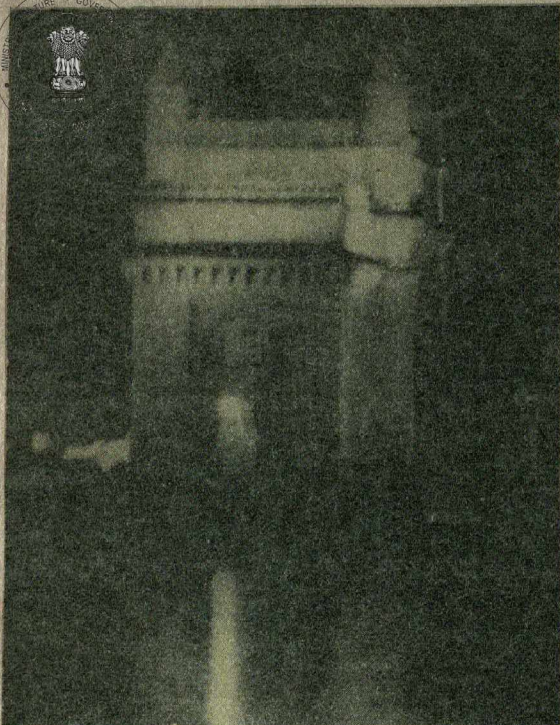
The Portuguese Church of Dadar with a small market place in front of it.



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Left :

Nocturn—Gateway
of India mirrored
in the dark sea.

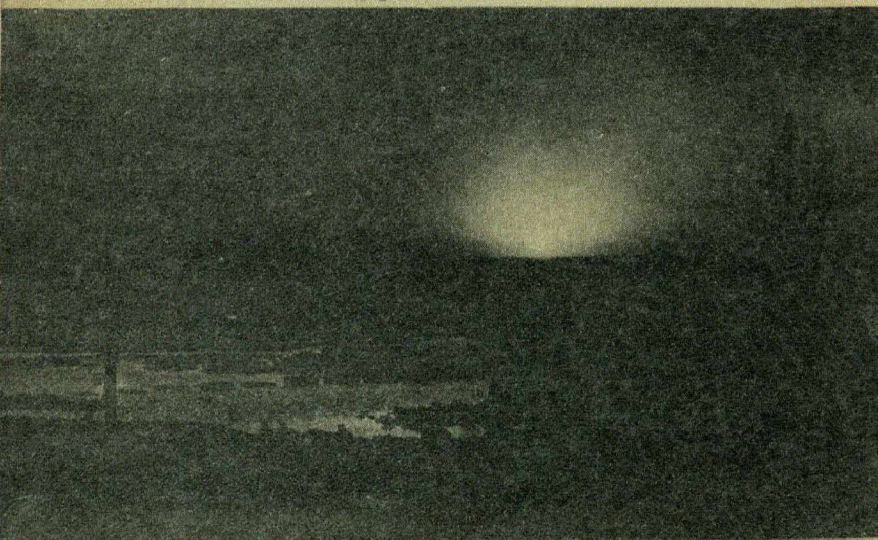


Below :

Sunset over the
Indian Ocean, seen
from Marine Drive.

Chapter XIII

Chapter XIII





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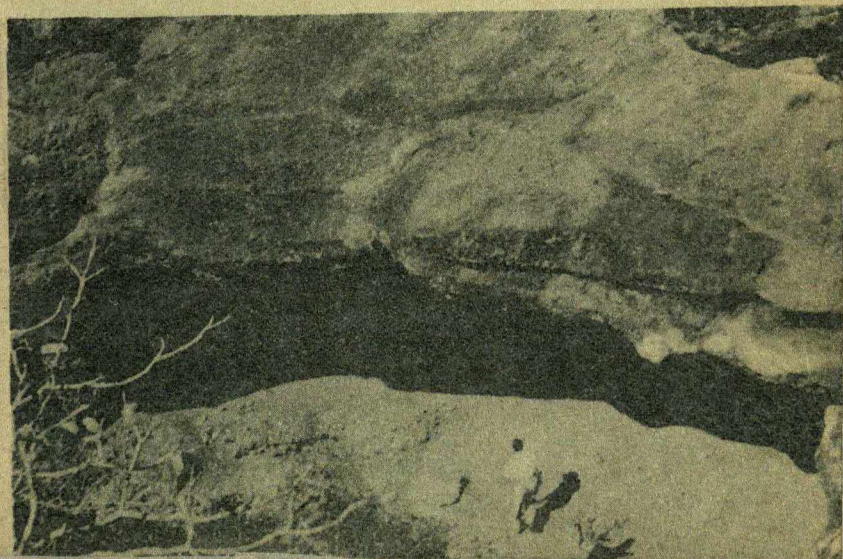
A Buddhist Votive shrine in Kanheri, sculptured out of the living rock.

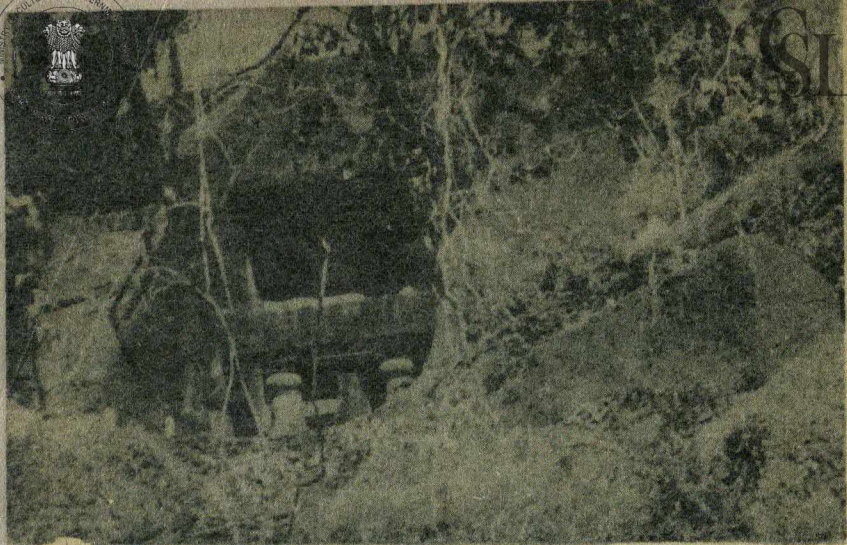
Below .

The entrance to the Kanheri caves overhung by a massive brow of rock

Chapter XIV

Chapter X



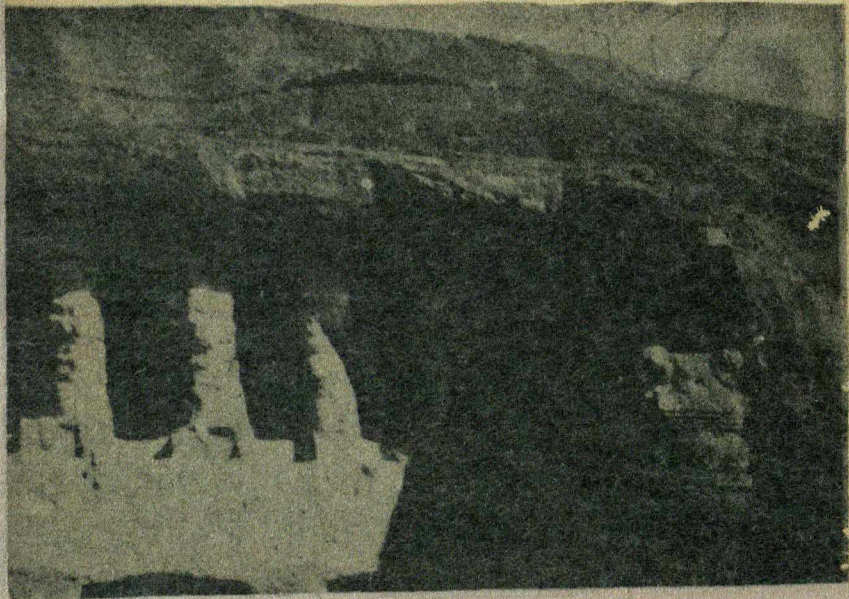


Chapter XIV

Above : Front view of a small rock chapel of Kanheri.

Below : The only source of light for the Great Chapel.

Chapter XIV





A LOST PEPPER PORT

61

open sea and the mouth of the river seemed the most suitable place for building a fortified post to watch over the factory. The agreement was ratified by the Supreme Council of Pondicherry in 1721-22.

As the months went by and the season for sailing to Europe came and went, the Bayanor began to wonder when the new factory was going to avail itself of the pepper monopoly, for that year's purchases had amounted to an unimportant quantity. On their side, the Factors, being businessmen, fully realised the unfortunate implications that would arise from their small purchases, and they made urgent and repeated requests to the Supreme Council for sufficient funds to cover the entire pepper crop and thus, apart from doing good business, establish their prestige. But Pondicherry, no more than any of the other French settlements, ever had enough funds to spare even for backing the soundest commercial proposition, or to turn Mayyali into the biggest pepper port on the coast of Malabar—which it might easily have become. Ships from France were few and irregular, and their shipments of silver persistently far below the needs of the settlements; so that, even had the Factors managed to buy up the pepper crop, there were not enough ships to convey it to France. Such, indeed, were the straits of the Factors that they could not present the Bayanor the sort of offerings that would convince him of their sincerity or soundness, or even sufficient to make him curb his impatience.

Meanwhile, the neighbouring factory of Tellicherry had come to feel how Mahé, only five miles distant, was likely to become a grave threat to its interests. Now France and England were not just then at war, and orders from home enjoined peaceful relationship with other European factories; there seemed but one obvious course for a patriotic Factor to adopt. Thus, it did not take long for the whole countryside to learn about the uncertainty of French promises, of the Factors' lack of financial backing, of the Company's territorial ambitions draped over by the cloak of trade; and, was it not a fact that the ships flying the French colours were constantly molested at sea by any rival Company or free pirate, while Mayyali was incapable of either defending them or of suppressing the aggressors, or even of obtaining redress from them? Unhappily, but from very different motives, these stories seemed to be fully substantiated by the behaviour of



the Mayyali Factors. At last, having refused for some time to listen to rumour, the Bayanor began to heed the insinuations and consider himself free from his engagements with the French Company; he took the disinterested advice tendered to him and ordered the French off his territory, then turned for support to his advisers in Tellicherry. Thus ends the first chapter of the story with the first loss of Mayyali, after brave but feeble resistance, in 1724.

These melancholy beginnings are the keynote to the rest of the story which, with some variations and additions, is a repetition of the first part. Mayyali was brilliantly recovered from the Bayanor and his backers in 1725 by that outstanding yet quite unaccountable man, Admiral Mahé de la Bourdonnais, who was not then yet the doughty admiral of Ile de France, but a young officer in the French fleet. In recognition of his services in the recapture of the factory, Mayyali was renamed Mahé. Though la Bourdonnais restored for a time the military prestige of France, the Compagnie des Indes did not then, nor at any subsequent time, restore full confidence in her commercial soundness, not through the lack of ability of the men, but by sending insufficient supplies of specie.

From this first recovery until 1761 Mahé remained a French possession; this was the period of its greatest activity and success, except for the Mahratta blockade of 1742-43, which was relieved again by la Bourdonnais, now Governor of the Ile de France. It was then that the stout Mansion was built, and an inland hillock fortified—now known as the Place d'Armes—and a garrison kept up; the people lived in comfort and a brisk trade flourished. Yet, despite the best efforts of its Factors and of the Supreme Council, Mahé never paid for itself nor ever attained the position that, with adequate backing and in a different spirit, it could have reached. But then, Mahé was no longer a mere trading centre, it was a fortified post that the exigencies of prestige required, in defiance of other powers, on the coast of Malabar. It could with advantage to the Compagnie have been relinquished for all the profit that accrued through the trade and commerce it transacted.

With the fall of French supremacy in the Carnatic and more, perhaps, due to the French people's fundamental lack of interest in empire, Mahé lost its purpose and meaning, and



followed the unsteady fortunes of Pondicherry. It passed back and forth between the French and the English with such frequency that the inhabitants must, surely, have fled in dismay to less contested places, or until such time as the question be settled once and for all. 1761, Mahé was captured by the English, but restored to France in 1763, "dismantled and defenceless, its trade annihilated," and its influence gone. 1778-79, it was again lost, but restored in 1783, only to be captured in 1793 and again in 1803. This, with the other dismantled and defenceless possessions, was finally handed back to France in 1816, since when it has been maintained with, one feels, something of that sentimental and off-handed attention afforded to worn out and aging retainers. Mahé had lost its recuperative powers; the pepper trade had passed to more prosperous hands and it probably meant investments that nobody either wanted to or could make to call trade back into what had now become a backwater.

In many ways it is sad to visit Mahé; in many ways it is rather like stepping into a nursery full of happy childhood memories; in many ways it is just another section of the Malabar Coast and in a number of subtle feelings, it is different to the neighbouring tracts. There seems, however, to the lay mind, no special reason for its perpetuation; were it just Mayyali once more, it would soon forget it had ever been anything but just another of those picturesque stretches of the coast of Malabar.

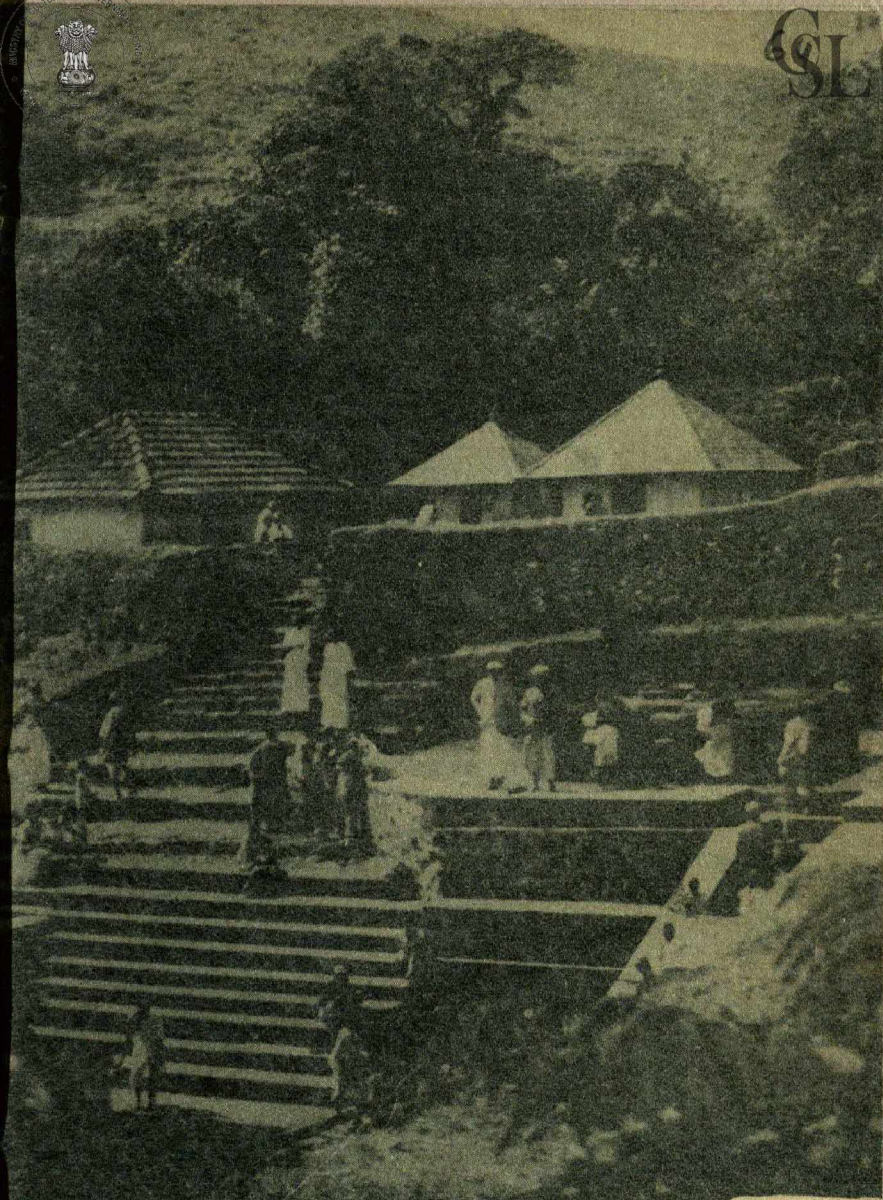


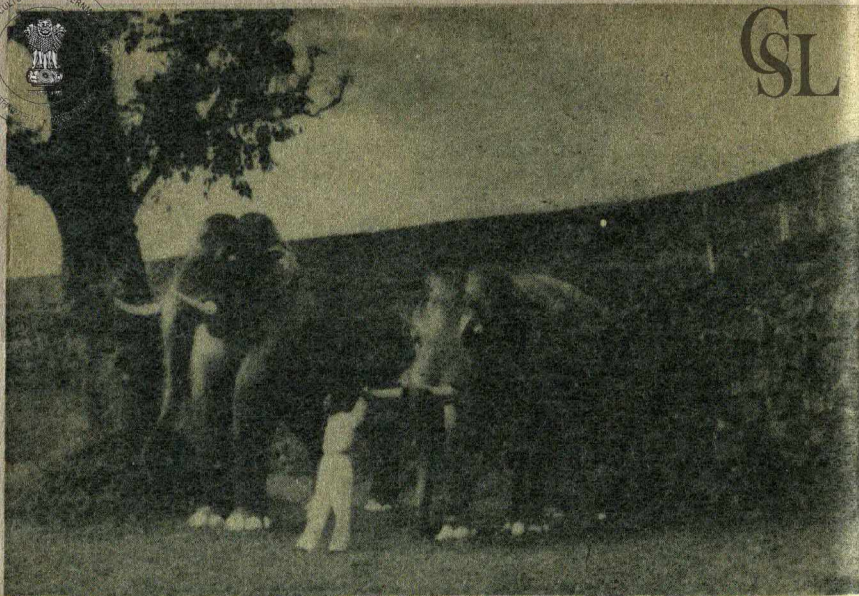
GIVE AN INCH AND LOSE AN ELL

Who speaks of Mahé must also speak of Tellicherry, its complement, its rival, its successful survivor. Like Mahé, Tellicherry was probably nothing more than an unimportant little trading town—perhaps not even that, but merely a fishing village—before the Pepper Competition started in the late seventeenth century; for, unlike Mahé it did not have a large enough river to use as safe anchorage and protection from the sea. It had, however, one great point in its favour: it was of easy reach for the whole pepper country, and it was the nearest place to the Periah Pass into Wynaad where was grown the finest cardamom in the world.

The original name, Talacherri, suggests that, already before the Europeans came to this coast, the spot had been found convenient as a Head Market. The French established a *comptoir*, or *loge*, here, fairly early in their stay on the western coast, but they abandoned it leaving behind nothing but a small fort with mud walls. Quick in the uptake, the English Company took over from the French about 1694-95, on a concession granted them by the Northern Regent of the Kolattiri Raja, and made of it a flourishing pepper port for themselves. The first Chief of the Tellicherry factory started that long series of moves and counter-moves between, among, through, and over the various chieftains of the Malabar territories which take up so large a space in the annals of the twin ports, Mahé and Tellicherry.

There was nothing much to see in, nor to commend, the place in the eyes of the uninformed; in the words of a contemporary traveller: "The place where the Factory now stands belonged to the French who left the mud walls of a Fort built by them to serve the English when they first settled there, and for many years they continued so, but of late no small pains and charge have been bestowed on its buildings; but for what reason I know not for it has no River near it that can want its protection, nor can it defend the Road from the insults of Enemies, unless it be for small vessels that can





Chapter X

Above : The two elephant figures inside the fort of Mercara.

Below : The great horns that wail at festivals and ceremonies.

Chapter



come within some rocks that lay half a mile off or to protect the Company's Warehouse, and a Punch-House that stands on the Sea-Shore a short Pistol Shot from the garrison."

By 1702 Tellicherry is mentioned in the official records as one of the factories affiliated to Bombay, and regular correspondence was exchanged between it and the parent factory. Two years later the unprotected warehouse was causing some uneasiness among the local noblemen, who expressed their misgivings by giving it as much trouble as they could and damaging the outskirts of the settlement. These noblemen had, not impossibly, some good reason for their uneasiness, since the Factors were out to make as much money as they could for their Company and, incidentally, for themselves; the establishment was already proving a blessing for so astute a person as the notorious Mr Robert Adams who was strongly suspected of having at least one finger in every unsavoury pie. Howbeit, the Northern Regent, the *Vadakkalankur*, of Kolattiri, gave his consent to the building of a fort and himself laid the foundation stone thereof—which sounds a very modern note in the method of doing things and of humouring somebody from whom further favours might be required. On the tide of this good will, a house site and a hill were taken over, with the consent of their owners, one is told, on which to build a fort-house and a fort, and a whole street of weavers was bought up to add to Company property.

The old town of Tellicherry itself spread behind the fort was surrounded by a stone wall to protect the inhabitants from the king's enemies; one of these enemies that caused trouble to the Company was a small chieftain, known as the Nayar, whose domains lay between Tellicherry and Mahé. By 1719, however, peace was arrived at and the Nayar was persuaded to make reparations for his hostility and to give the pepper monopoly of his domains to the English factory as well as the loan of the Mailan Hill, a convenient point from which to dominate Mahé. So, the factory was not doing too badly for itself out of its local wars under the able management of Mr Robert Adams.

As Adams was not a man to waste money on wars unless they were likely to be profitable, when they gave no signs of this he deemed it much better business to subsidise others' folly with large sums from the factory reserves. He had been managing both the pepper trade and forward business



In disputes for a good many years when he was relieved of his onerous duties by the arrival of Mr Braddyl and reprimands from the Company. Matters had to be looked into, advanced moneys had to be recovered, the factory could not be committed to such large sums of money when its purpose was to supply pepper in large quantities for shipping. One prince alone was found to owe the Tellicherry factory no less than 6,68,122.04 fanams, and everybody was properly appalled at the discovery. Mrs Adams was detained in the fort while her husband was sent touring with Mr Braddyl for the purpose of recovering moneys owed to the Company. What happened during this tour has never transpired—nor were the advances made good as far as one knows—but, somehow, Mrs Adams calmly set sail, ostensibly for Fort St. George, picked up her good husband in Calicut, and thence the couple vanish from all records. It was probably more convenient not to enquire what happened to their ship; it was less trouble and more expedient to forget about Mr Adams, for had he not done good business, indeed, and was not the money, in reality, very well invested with excellent prospects of continued returns for very many happy years to come?

Now, Mahé had also been doing some business in pepper and it had, most unfortunately, acquired the monopoly from the Bayanor on whose territory the French settlement was established. Taken all round, the Factors of Tellicherry felt it was safer at that time to direct their activities in the intervals of the pepper season towards the French and to curtail, temporarily at least, their interests in local wars. The English factory had plenty of money, and the French settlement was always short; the scales were, literally, heavily weighted against Mahé. The Council at Madras, moreover, regarded the French as intruders and expressed both surprise and concern at what success they had had in their settlement; the thing to do was to obstruct the rival and acquire the entire monopoly of all the pepper from all the princes of the neighbourhood, and this was absorbing diplomatic sport. A perusal of the activities of those representatives of two great European nations at that time is strangely instructive though, in the context of the country as a whole and the developments that were taking place at that period, they might well be likened to a game of marbles played by a group of small boys in the middle of a busy street.



The Tellicherry Factors took their game of marbles very seriously, however; so seriously that open rupture between the two rival settlements, only five miles apart, seemed imminent. None the less a measure of poise and façade had to be maintained; it would be unseemly for these two nations to take up arms against each other while the local princes looked on. Most fortunately, just about this time the great yearly hunt of the Nayars took place and the heads of the rival Companies were graciously invited to participate. The heads of the factories had to appear with suitable escort, naturally, that they might honour both their hosts and their masters. Something turned sour in the hunt and things began to look very black; the fault was, of course, that elusive other man's and everybody was quite blameless and shocked. Arguments followed and it was mutually agreed by the rival heads that, naturally enough, it was all the fault of their host, and reparations must be obtained from him. None the less, some caution must be observed and the princes could not be pushed too far, and the rival heads again agreed, for supplies had to be obtained from inland to justify their positions and the princes could not be aggrieved to the point of refusing these supplies; moreover, wars were expensive and friendship cheap—peace was, therefore, the best policy. How wise this decision was, soon appeared when letters from both the parent Companies in Europe ordered the factories of Mahé and Tellicherry to behave themselves and live at peace; they must make money and recover any debts or make up losses caused by untimely quarrels; whatever the home countries might or might not do, the two factories must remain on peaceful terms that was definite. Whereupon friendship was sealed with repeated exchanges of visits and banquets, and much expenditure in gunpowder for rousing salutes.

These were strange times, as every man tried to be cleverer than his neighbour; some were, and some only thought they were and, in the final sorting out, quite a number of the pawns—or marbles—in this grim game found themselves in the bag of the opponent. Moreover, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the West Coast was being drawn into the mesh of events on the far side of the Ghats; local fights took a more far-reaching turn and armies from over the border began to appear in almost as great quantities as the pepper itself, and things looked almost as black as the finest of that most



indispensable of spices. Tellicherry trembled at the guns of de la Bourdonnais, though it put up a stout resistance; at one time, it looked as though, after all, Mahé was justified in that superior smile of triumph that was so irritating to see. Careful schemes had to be evolved to secure strong footholds before the French, and every possible advantage had to be pressed. Tellicherry stood its ground and, thanks to events outside its sphere of influence, survived the storms of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, and lived to see its rival sink into all but oblivion. It lived to receive visits from the Rajas of Coorg, to entertain the Bombay army on its march towards Serinapatam, and to witness the extinction of all those chieftains who had been the stimulus for so much careful scheming and manoeuvring in the early days of its existence.

Standing on one of the summits behind the town of Tellicherry today, the glance takes in a peaceful and green scenery of palm trees without number, of peasants striding up and pacing down the many slopes to and from their huts to the market; the wide spread of ocean stretches glistening in the sunshine and, between the rolling waves, small fishing craft excavated from logs of wood toss up and down while their crew search the waters with their nets. Down the winding creek float thousands of logs of timber—one of Tellicherry's better trades today—mountains of coconuts are piled up ready for export, and on the slopes of the town's undulations nice-looking houses nestle in the thick tropical greenery. In the distance towards land, rise in bronze haze the outlines of the Ghats, and beneath one's feet are the red bricks and stones that once formed part of a fort. The fort is in such a state of ruin that it is difficult to place it in time though it cannot be very old; nor, in all this peace and industriousness does it at all seem consistent with its surroundings, save as a picturesque addition.

Along this beautiful stretch of coast there would seem to be no necessity nor cause ever to have ill-feelings or entertain hostile intentions towards anybody at any time; it is only when re-entering the town and coming face to face with the factory-fort, now used for some administrative offices, on the seashore that memories of strife are forced back into the mind. But these, too, are quickly dismissed when strolling along the narrow streets where every second booth or so is piled up high with scented and medicinal herbs that look



GIVE AN INCH AND LOSE AN ELL

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so mysterious, with plantains in luscious varieties, baskets and umbrella-hats, and many unfamiliar appurtenances to the fishing trade. Though everything looks leisurely, this is a land of unobtrusive industriousness. Funnily enough, the one commodity that one seems to miss most conspicuously, in Tellicherry, is pepper!



TO THE SEVEN ISLES

You were unknown, then ; since the time you had been, as scholars think, thrown up from the sea, solitude and the moods of nature had been your only companions. For unreckoned centuries you remained so, until one day some simple folk, who sprang from the same soil as you, appeared on your shores and were content with the amenities you offered them and with the patient occupation of catching fish. You offered undisputed possession and enjoyment of your shady groves of tamarinds and jack-fruit trees, coconuts and brab palms ; there were sheltered tide-fed creeks and you offered, too, a vast harbour where the ocean's uncertain temper would not deal roughly with a fisherfolk's frail craft. The seas that washed your rocky shores yielded a plentiful and varied harvest to the simple Koli folk who had come to you trusting in your hospitality.

You were unknown then ; though later, as Aparantaka, you were to become part of kingdoms whose kings had, perhaps, never seen you. You thus came to be included, too, in the course of time in the vast domains of Asoka Priyadarsi who ruled wisely and caused his Buddhist missionary monks to come even to Aparantaka. These missionary monks inscribed the record of their stay on a rock in Sopara, a little way up the coast from you, whereby they made known the name and law of the Emperor.

Years passed and momentous events took place, but your secluded life remained undisturbed, for you were seven little islands of no importance save to fisherfolk. You did not even know that new dynasties were claiming you as their own possession. With the rise of the Satakarnis, the Andhrabhritiyas of Puranic lists, a new era had started for you and changes gradually took place over you, though these left your fisherfolk undisturbed in their occupations ; some of them had even started tilling fields with millet and other frugal grain. In extending their power, the Satakarnis also extended their connections with the outside world, so that you now saw ships



from foreign lands sail up your larger creeks to reach the trading port of Srithana on the farther side of Salsette. Fleets of white-sailed ships bearing strange cargoes came regularly up and down the creek from Egypt and Arabia, Greece and Asia Minor; past Mahim they went and back again with the change of the winds towards their own countries. And so it went on with you for several centuries.

Now another wave of history, so to say, passed over you. For reasons unknown to you and that interested you little, the Rashtrakutas of Malkhed replaced the Satakarnis, and you passed under a new sway. Still your fisherfolk brought their craft to the beach of Pallav, and still commerce flowed into Srithana and the other ports up the coast. Ancient records tell of how the great king Mithridates sent his Parthians with merchandise overland to Aparantaka, and of the ships that came from the ports of the whole world to trade in sesamum oil, sugar, spices, and even in handsome young women from Hellas. By this time you each had acquired names; one was the *kola-bhai*, the Koli hamlet where the fishers gathered, and *machcha-gao* where they dried their catches of slim silver-fish in the sun to use them as food in the meagre season; there was *mumbadevi* known for the very ancient Koli shrine to the goddess. Up a steep ladder-like path ran the pilgrim route through dense jungles on Malabar Hill, right on to the point jutting into the ocean and to that holy cleft, the Sri Gundi. It was here, people said, that you had given shelter to Rama on his way to Lanka.

You were no longer unknown, then, in the sixth century when the Buddhist monastery was thriving at Kanheri in the heart of Salsette island. You felt how the monastery brought prosperity and folk from many different parts of the land to your secluded nooks. Towns grew up, traders settled in them, and more and more land came under the plough of the cultivators to feed the increasing population.

But changes continued to occur on the mainland: your rulers, the Rashtrakutas, were overthrown by the increasingly powerful Western Chalukyas, and you became a Chalukya possession. Your new kings came to you, they crossed over to the rocky island safe within the shelter of your harbour, and built a beautiful city which they named Gharapuri, or Puri, for short. It was the "goddess of the fortunes of the western coast," men said. To build Puri came, by order of the Chalukyas



skilled craftsmen and artists who cut into the rocky heart of the island and made wonderful temples, seemingly for all time. It was this island that the Portuguese were to call Elephanta, when they saw its ruins some centuries later. And all the while more ships sailed up your creeks and now began to seek the shelter of your harbour.

But the Western Chalukyas, too, were doomed to lose their power; the Silaharas gradually overthrew them and, by the end of the tenth century, you had become Silahara land. As the decades succeeded one another you watched stone-engravers inscribe in the caves of Kanheri monastery the names of the greatest of these Silaharas; you prospered under them for they encouraged commerce and welcomed settlers. It was at this time, too, that there came to Kanheri and left inscribed the record of their sojourn, a group of co-religionists from Persia, the forerunners, perhaps, of that important section of your present-day inhabitants. In the busy town of Srithana you felt the tread of people from such distant lands as China and Persia, of new people from North India and of traders from the far south; sandal-wood, ambergris, aloes, camphor, spikenard, and all those fascinating scented resins, Chinese porcelain, cowries, and gold dust were common wares in your markets. You held the weight and majesty of temples, you lived to the rhythm of an organised society; more lands were cultivated, and your fisherfolk found increased work in catering to the needs of more numerous centres. You were no longer unknown; the trading ships that touched at your ports brought in their wake those who seek to live on the spoils of others' labour. Pirates, alas! now infested your seas and preyed on your merchant shipping. The dreaded pirates of the western coast already feared by the traders of antiquity, were to continue their nefarious activities for many a hundred years more.

In 1260 you saw the last of your Silahara kings go down with his ship off Mahim point. The Yadava king, Mahadev of Devgiri, with his train of elephants had bereft him of his last possessions; but he himself was to be bereft of his own by Alla-ud-din Khilji, Sultan of Delhi, thirty-two years later. But even from this you benefited, for it heralded the arrival of a king whose good administration lies impressed over you. Bhima Raja fled from Devgiri and rested in one of your Mahim glades where he decided to settle. Then did you see his



palace rise in the palm groves, and the houses of his numerous followers grow one by one around it ; your trees were dedicated to the temples of Mumbadevi and Prabhadevi. Bhima Raja abandoned Puri and made his capital Mahikavati, which you know today as Mahim. In the wake of good king Bhim came, from the ravaged mainland, Bhandaris and Agris who were farmers and toddy-tappers ; they brought with them fruit and flowers and laid orchards amidst your palm groves ; and there came, too, readers of sacred books and readers of the stars. You became more populated during those happy years of development ; on every one of you were founded estates, fields, and villages, for there was land and water in plenty for all. In the older portions of the present-day city the name of many a locality still bears witness to the settlers who made their homes on you and lived in the days of good king Bhim.

Time passed and your peaceful, unhurried life was coming to an end. Territorial ambitions, hundreds of miles away, and the impact of contending armies had elsewhere shaken the country ; at first, however, you only felt the exhausted ripples of those political waves, but Sultan Mubarak soon ordered the occupation of his entire dominions, and you were part of them. Raja Bhim lost his life ; his brave queen endeavoured to stand in his stead but failed, for the time had come for invaders. One of your legends relates how the three goddesses, from their sea-washed temples at the northern curve of Malabar Hill opposite Worli Point, plunged into the sea when Aparantaka of ancient India became a military outpost of the Sultanate of Delhi. By 1348 the rule of the Sultanate was well established over you, and for about two centuries you witnessed the contests of rival kingdoms.

Then, in the sailing season of 1507-8 you were startled by the appearance of a new sort of people. Their ship glided up the Mahim creek and cast anchor off the fort. You had seen many costumes from many lands, but you were not prepared for these ; obviously, theirs was a colder climate, for their clothes were thick and heavy. You had heard many tongues spoken in your markets, but this was a new tongue these foreigners spoke and you were soon to learn that they had left the western world in search of "Christians and spices." For many years they prowled round your shores, noting the trade and the safety of your harbour that commanded the



Arabian Sea ; they harassed your shipping, they bombarded your fort of Mahim, and burnt the town after their victorious encounter with the Gujarat fleet. Somehow you felt that a new phase in your history had set in, but what lay in store was still unknown.

But events soon showed that the Portuguese were determined on your possession ; the Viceroy, Nuño da Cunha, sent his ships constantly in and out of your creeks, frightening the people with armed landings. Finally, Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat, who had earlier conquered you, and the Viceroy of Goa, who had occupied you, concluded a treaty whereby you were to pass to the Portuguese Crown for all time.

So abundantly supplied were you with all manner of foods and refreshments that the Portuguese named you the Island of Good Life. They brought their settlers who measured out new estates for themselves ; gradually fruit-filled "oarts" round garden houses were dotted over the greater part of your members. It seems strange to call to mind, today, quite such a rural setting as the one you presented in the sixteenth century, for you have seen great changes since then. With the settlers came Franciscan monks and Jesuits who worked for a harvest of souls among the fisherfolk and cultivators ; they founded monasteries laid in their own grounds, and built the first Franciscan church of St. Michael opposite Mahim Fort—those same bells that rang to mass then, still ring today while motor-cars pass by.

A goodly traffic now existed between your islands, though still between Worli and Malabar Hill the sea "poured in with all the fury and pleasure of an Arabian colt" over the low-lying lands where, today, other Arab colts are trained to race with fury and pleasure for different kinds of stakes. But many changes were taking place : Pydhoni, the Foot-wash where pilgrims had been wont to lave their feet before entering the Bhendi grove of the goddess or the temple of Mumbadevi, was bridged and slowly began silting up, with refuse as much as sand. On the harbour-side of Mumbadevi's isle grew up the Manor House surrounded by its pleasant garden—this was to become the nucleus of Bombay Castle with the Cotton Green of later times, and the Elphinstone Circle of today.

Garden estates, however, were merely by the way ; it was your command of the Arabian Sea that had commended



itself to the Portuguese. Soon, no ships were allowed to carry merchandise along the coast without a certificate from the Portuguese Government. By the early years of the seventeenth century, the English in their factory of Surat began to realise, too, how greatly you could strengthen a Company's commercial position. For the acquisition of such advantages as you offered, the Surat Factors urged their Directors in London, during half a century, to negotiate your purchase from the Portuguese, while employing more forceful methods themselves in the same endeavour. In one of these endeavours and with the aid of the Dutch, you saw an English landing in 1626, when the Manor House was burnt and the settlers thoroughly frightened. In the end, however, you were once more to change hands, though neither through the Company's negotiations nor through the Factors' expeditions; strangely enough, it was as a gift from the Portuguese king. As it were a make-weight, you were included in the dowry of Catherine of Braganza on her marriage to Charles II of England, though neither the donor nor the English Crown realised what this implied.

The Viceroy of Goa and the Factors of Surat, however, knew well enough what you represented; for, in 1665 when he handed you over formally to England, the Viceroy wrote to his king: "I confess at the feet of your Majesty that only the obedience I owe your Majesty, as a vassal, could have forced me to this deed, because I foresee the great troubles that from this neighbourhood will result to the Portuguese; and that India will be lost on the same day in which the English nation is settled in Bombay". You have lived to witness how prophetic were those words. To add to his distress, the Viceroy recognised in the Crown Representative one Humphrey Cooke whom he had "known in Lisbon as a grocer." It was then you realised that modern times had set in.

Much as the settlers and landlords refused to recognise the new order, with many a flourish the instrument of possession had been signed, and Humphrey Cooke used what methods he knew to overcome the people's resistance. You had never seen such discontent and disorder as that which reigned for three years over your isles. Meanwhile, some skilled spokesman in London had convinced the king of the uselessness of these miserable little islands, and offered to take you over, consenting to make a present to the Crown of ten pounds a



year, payable on the 30th of every September.

The birth of a new self and the death of Surat took place with that businesslike transaction. The Manor House became Bombay Castle when Governor Gerald Aungier took possession in 1668; he began to build with God's assistance, he said, a commercial city. The Company pacified the landlords, invited weavers, artisans, and handicraftsmen from the mainland to settle on attractive terms round the Castle. Many came towards you, for political strife had unsettled many a centre on the mainland; with the prospect of trade, merchants arrived from Gujarat with their families, and Parsis in increasing numbers, for trade attracts trade. A good diplomat and businessman, Governor Aungier offered shipping facilities and founded commercial societies; within a very few years your complexion had completely changed.

The town of Bombaim with its population of mixed races was constantly expanding, the main bazaar was a full mile in length, lined by low houses thatched with straw and palm leaves; more pleasant to you, however, were the fields and groves of tamarind that still cloaked the neighbourhood of this growing city. More and more were you to retreat from the spot once sacred to the goddess and find your former self in the wilds of Malabar Hill, among the rocks of Worli, and the woods of Mahim. Round the Castle rose up a Mint, a Customs House and warehouses with windows whose panes were oyster shells; in 1673 was formed the first Militia of those same Bhandaris who had come with good king Bhim; then came a judge with his perquisite of palanquin and gown, for population spells litigation; a shipyard had taken shape where the *wadia* from Surat built his famous Nusserwanji ships as handsome, so the factors conceded, as "our English vessels"; folk from inland brought their wares, for so many people wanted a great deal to eat. Now and then the trading tenor of your life was disturbed by the bombardments of former allies turned enemies, or of pirates, or of those still discontented with the famous wedding gift. Your creeks were used as convenient sewers and began silting up; unoccupied land had to be brought under the plough and other areas reclaimed, for there were many mouths to feed; it was towards this time that the first efforts were made to curb the Arabian colt and protect the food crops on the new lands. The salt pans near Sewri were in greater demand, the fisherfolk



had plenty to do, and their *bumaloe* became a delicacy on the Factors' tables, worthy of mention in news letters for "home."

The town that Gerald Aungier had planned was taken over by his successors who urged, as he had urged, the despatch of likely wives for the Factors and writers. Well, this was nothing very new for you, for had you not, centuries ago, gazed on the fair maidens of Hellas? This, however, proved different and you soon were to regret that the choice had been as indiscriminating as it was unfortunate. With the arrival of these wives, everything seems to go wrong at once in this money-making centre of Bombay. Was it your revenge for unmerited desecration, or was it by some other design that you turned from the Island of Good Life into the Charnel House of Factors?

From the hastily built and unplanned town with its increasing population; from the streams and ditches filled with refuse that the sea could no longer wash away; from the rotting vegetation of lands partly reclaimed, there arose as it were a pall of pestilence that was to hang for many years over the new town. Sickness stalked inexorably from road to road, entering every house and sparing none; not a child under seven survived, scarcely an English wife was left, and the life of a man was reckoned to last two monsoons. There was no hospital, and only one doctor poorly paid and ill-equipped; the centre of population shifted from the town to Mendham's Point, which soon had to be replaced by another cemetery. The population that had increased sixfold in ten years dwindled to one quarter. After fourteen years of pestilence—and the tenacity of the people amazed you—the Governor and Council decided to take measures to improve the town's hygiene and clean up its society; merchants began to leave the once crowded areas and move towards Pydhoni and the Bhendi Grove, spreading over Parel where the air was good. Those who could, took possession of the old "oarts" and only worked in the Fort area; the Governor himself showed the way by occupying the disused church in Parel—quaintly enough, this house was being used as a research institute for plague not so many decades ago. With 1718 a fresh start was made, and Bombay to you became a stranger, important and haughty, while you receded yet farther from the centres of business; from now on there was no turning back, you



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were fated to become an inseparable part of this new city that was growing, and you were to become the city of Bombay.

For more than a hundred years you watched the one-time settlement turned with stern resolve into a rich and prosperous merchant-city; by the middle of the nineteenth century a chronicler could write: "The old commercial town was transformed into a royal city." Already quite early communications between your seven selves had been improved: Mahim and Sion were joined by a causeway, a ferry boat plied between Sion and Salsette; the creeks of former times were now filled up, and all the while your population grew. Seventy thousand in 1744; one hundred and eighty thousand in 1814; two hundred and thirty-six thousand in 1836, according to the rough estimates of the times. The fort had been walled-in and surrounded by a ditch that could be flooded at will, so your population had to seek living space to the north of the big bazaar, yet within easy reach of the wharfs and warehouses, on plots allotted by a special committee; newsletters now mentioned that a "new town was a-building" with "oarts" and gardens between the dockyards and the Back Bay. The huddled dwellings and shops within the fort had been demolished in an endeavour to replan the town; seemingly, exclusively for officials and the really wealthy. Outside the fort precincts, however, all comers were welcomed and allowed to build where they listed; all trades and crafts were protected and encouraged, for were you not destined to become the Grand Mart of the Western Coast?

Reclaimed salt lands had been leased out on special terms to cultivators, and a far-sighted scheme to block the Great Breach between Mahalakshmi poin' and Worli proposed to bring yet more fields for the Kumbis' ploughs. Work on this breach was stopped in 1727, but was taken up again with the turn of the century, for food and ever more food was required for the increasing numbers of your people. As the years passed, your earliest folk, the Koli fishermen, could less and less be spared for the menial task many of them had taken up: people were forbidden to employ Kolis as palanquin-bearers as they were needed to gather more fish, and more fish for the increasing population.

Then came a post office and a cotton press; a bank was founded, and three more dockyards; in Mazagaon was started a school for training poor boys in every branch of shipbuilding;



the courts of justice had become imposing, and professed to act in accordance with the injunctions of the Directors in London, that "there be entire justice exercised to all persons without distinction"; and three hospitals had been established together with Protestant Charity Schools and Bodies appointed to improve public sanitation. How much civic sense all this appeared to imply, yet many a decade more was to pass before visitors could no longer comment on the variety and foulness of the stench, the uses of the foreshores, and the open drains barring the way to the grand villas of Malabar Hill.

Nevertheless, you had become an "elegant town" in the eyes of visitors; you had comfortable and well furnished private dwellings in the fashionable quarters of Church Street; you had well-laid-out streets and a large bazaar filled with merchandise from all over the world; European visitors remarked on the tall houses in "Asiatic" style belonging to the wealthy Indian merchants and on the spaciousness of their bungalows. Then came the semi-Grecian pile of the new Town Hall, and St. Thomas' Church stood in rebuke to those early ungodly times when piety was out of fashion; it had contained its first congregation in 1781 as a result of the stinging exhortations of the Reverend Cobbe that released sufficient funds to build a church.

There had been many an experiment at town-planning, in the course of those years: knolls had been levelled and vales filled up. Dongri Hill whence the Siddi's guns had threatened the Fort, was bereft of its eminence to become the site on which St. George's Hospital stands today. Coconut plantations disappeared and rows of houses took their place; the herds of cattle were chased from Malabar Hill to make way for mansions and residences, some people even reaching the farther slopes. With vast wealth came some desire to recompense the Most High, and you saw temples and churches and mosques rise in Walkeshwar, Mahalakshmi, Babulnath, in Pydhoni, in the Fort and by the Cooperage; why, there were fire temples, too, and a synagogue or so. And now at last the Great Breach was stopped and named Hornby Vellard, thus completing the consolidation of all your members from Apollo Gate to Worli, and from Malabar Point to the salt pans of Sewri.

In 1704 pestilence had shaken the Governor and Council



into civic action ; in 1803 it was fire. Despite the numerous laws on town clearance, the city was still overcrowded and, within a few hours, one third of the Fort had been consumed by flames ; what legislation could not accomplish, one sweep of nature's fiery tongue ensured—hundreds left the Fort area to find new homes outside the limits of Pydhoni and Bhendi Bazaar. Thus was founded that amazing centre of merchant life that was to spread its countless ramifications over the vast area just north of the Fort ; with the laying of Kalbadevi, Abdur Rehman Street and Sheik Memon Street, trading supremacy was lost forever to the Fort Bazaar.

The conflagration stirred the Corporation to frame new building laws, to light the streets and take some further measures about city sanitation ; yet, though born to greatness, how far was this town of yours from cleanliness ! The yearly water-famine that had long forced the poorer inhabitants to sift the filth from the town ditch was finally partly relieved when Lake Vehar on Salsette was trained towards the town.

Faster communications with the outside world became pressing, to satisfy the growing requirements of the growing city ; fortnightly messengers set out with the postal bags, through Hyderabad, in twenty-five days to Madras ; steam mail ships to England sailed every month, then every week ; the overland route up the Red Sea and through Egypt became better known. Links with all places everywhere, a Causeway to Colaba where was settled the military contingent, a Causeway at Sion made an easier inland trade route up the Western Ghats to the open country beyond ; the Company's trade monopoly was abolished, and private commercial enterprise linked new trading spots from England to China with your shores.

It was now a far cry to the rude Humphrey Cooke and the far-sighted Aungier ; with assured wealth, the focus had been changing ever so gradually from mere commercial expansion to more subtle ambitions. For long and long, with the Portuguese still hostile and the Dutch as skilful rivals, with the Angrias and the Sidis of Janjira on the seas to threaten shipping, with the Mahrattas at the height of their power, it had seemed wiser to concentrate on protection of commercial interests than to take active sides in politics ; thus it came to pass that, sorely pressed by the Mahrattas on Salsette, and Thana about to fall, the Portuguese should have



entreated in vain for help from the Company in Bombay—a rival was removed without the cost of a single copper. Meanwhile letters from London rejoiced at the friendly relations with the Mahrattas, and the skilful handling of the Angrias whose internal strife meant safety to the Company; the dreaded Sidi of Janjira lost ground in this contest of diplomatic wits and met his fate at the hands of Robert Clive who stormed the pirate stronghold of Gheria. But joy was not unmixed, for the Dutch were soon to thrive on those very seas that the Company claimed to have rendered safe for its own shipping.

Ostensibly as a sound commercial measure, the defences of the Fort had been considerably strengthened; there were strong positions at Worli, Mahim, Sion, Mazagaon, apart from the Fort and Fort St. George; by 1771 Bombay was reputed to be impregnable. The time had come to cast aside the cloak of the merchant and emerge in the armour of political power; the days of anxious self-defence were over and those of military successes, possibly of territorial acquisition, were ushered in. In this new strength, a treaty could be imposed on the Peshwas whereby Salsette, Elephanta, and other small islands were added to your numbers; a garrison was placed at Thana, and Bassein was wrested from the Mahrattas; the Konkan was covered, part of the rice crops and some revenue were secured, and an end put to European commercial rivalry. There were Marines, now, that policed the Indian Seas, and political authority came to equal commercial prestige—in 1818 you had become the capital of the Presidency of Bombay. There was no recognising, even now, the seven desolate little islands in this headquarters of the Paramount Power in Western India with its immense fortunes.

Yet, this was not the end and more was to come, for mechanical and scientific discoveries were to be harnessed to daily life and accelerate the pace of Bombay's development; you were reckoned as one entity, as one "opulent settlement." One by one new things came about: newspapers and railways in 1850; in 1860 the mighty Bhore Ghat was conquered; 1857 brought the first spinning and weaving mill, and three more by 1860; the second great railway was laid and horse trams made their appearance in the streets; 1861, the American Civil War and the stupendous boom in cotton



with eighty million pounds sterling surplus profits in five years, with it a fever of speculation spread over the population. Despite the depression that followed the end of the American Civil War, money was still plentiful, for cotton was still an essential commodity everywhere. Now rose up many of the buildings that give a character to Bombay: the University Library, the Convocation Hall, Rajabhai Clock Tower, and Elphinstone Circle; the Post and Telegraph Office, Victoria Gardens and Museum, Victoria Terminus on the site of Mumbadevi's ancient temple, all in the famous "Bombay style." The age of gas had come and the streets were lighted; 1869, and the Suez Canal opens faster routes to Europe; 1875, a submarine cable to Suez, and the mails for the whole of India pass through Bombay port; 1875, and arterial roads run through the entire expanse of your body; more land reclaimed, the Back Bay scheme is inaugurated, and city sanitation, at last, is properly tackled; 1891, Bombay has a population of 821,764.

1901, just over two centuries of commercial expansion and, with the turn of each century, a scourge sweeps over you.

For five years the plague decimates the population; ten thousand deaths in one week, plague riots, business and traffic dislocated. In sheer self-defence, large amounts of private money are spent in fighting the plague; the Government House at Parel becomes a plague institute, and Haffkine is at work; it is a fight for survival, such great investments are at stake.

But the plague passed and electricity came instead; filaments for mantles and electric horse-power for horses. The age of hydro-electric plants and mighty schemes had set in; electric railways, power-driven industry, electric light in the streets and homes, electric heaters and razors. More land reclaimed, more building, more big business and industry, more visitors and tourists: Bombay becomes a small cosmos with the age of electricity, and you, that were once seven, know the power of your united strength, today.

There is little if anything left of the original settlement save place-names; some of them sound incomprehensible today, for their meaning is lost. There are no more causeways in Colaba, no more tanks at Dhobi Talao; there is no washing of feet in Pydhoni, nor is there a Bhendi grove; no castle nor fort occupies the Fort area, nor is the Esplanade



TO THE SEVEN ISLES

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near the sea ; even the memory of garden houses is gone from Parel and Dadar, and inexorably Mahim and Matunga are losing their palms and trees for Colonies and blocks of flats. Displaced by encroaching commerce, the ancient Koli fisher-folk have now retreated further north to the mainland ; in them alone is left the memory of olden times, for they still ply their trade with the sea and still dry their fish in the sun as when you first knew them. Yet they, too, may well adopt mechanical methods and wield an electric fish-catcher from an electric launch, while the women will place the catch on an electric drier and use a vacuum cleaner to gather it up into their baskets.

From its humble beginnings to the present teeming city, the lay to the seven isles has many lessons to teach. O you that are now one, take stock of yourself before the next step into a momentous future.



A BUDDHIST MONASTERY NEAR BOMBAY

Once the rains are over and the countryside sparkles with the yearly gift of vivifying water, one of the more lovely tracts outside Bombay is the heart of the island of Salsette. Still surprisingly untouched and wild near so vast and congested a city, the valley of the Tulsi is melodious at this time of year with the gurgle of rills and the song of birds. It is the time to undertake a sylvan pilgrimage to the anciently famed monastic city of the Buddhists—Kanheri that lies sleeping after its centuries of activity.

There is a sandy track to Kanheri that wanders, wayward as a stream, through palm groves, between fields, up and down steep inclines shaded with clumps of bamboos, and over and along rivulets.

Then, across the Tulsi valley with its sun-drenched fields and lonely farmsteads, its lazy cattle browsing in the stubble, its groves of mango-trees, and tall bushy-headed palms, the Kanheri hill itself appears at last. The characteristic dome-shaped top of dark grey stone quivers in the heat of the afternoon sun, and some of the caves are already visible to the naked eye. The forest ends on the edge of a broad strip of rough, bare rock; almost perpendicular rises the grey hill-side and, halfway up, start the chapels, lecture-halls, cells, and refectories that formed the huge monastery where a whole community lived, prayed, rejoiced, and passed away.

Kanheri is dead, today, save for a few straggly groups of beggars and gypsies sheltering in the caves; it is silent, too, save for an occasional forest sound that floats across the valley. On every hand are signs of the activity and purpose that reigned here for over fifteen centuries; work on the unfinished cells, the half-cut stairways, the roughly sketched relic mounds, and partly excavated cisterns, might well have ceased but yesterday—but it is a yesterday of several hundred years. Kanheri was still thriving when the Portuguese first came to the Konkan, but after the last faithful were converted to Christianity, the life of the monastery came to an end.



Under the Satakarni kings of the second century A. C. Kanheri was at the height of its fame and prosperity. It differed greatly then from its present state of wild loneliness; then were the relic mounds gay with festoons of flags and streamers; handrails skirted the well-cut stairways, and there were doors and windows to the neat, simple cells shaded from the sun with awnings. At the gates, vendors of fruits and incense mingled with the crowds of worshippers, while orange-robed monks moved with even pace over the grey dome of the hill—a pleasing colour-scheme against the deep blue sky. Feast days saw the yard before the Great Chapel all bright with flags and silken canopies; inside the chapel the incense-laden air, the flower-covered images, the richly decked relic shrines, intensified in the worshippers the beauty and solemnity of the words of the Buddha chanted by the Superior Brothers. When darkness fell, thousands of twinkling oil lamps traced the course of the stairways and outlined the caves.

Those were the times when the Mahayana school of Buddhism was at its height of exuberance; when sculpture and carving reached their highest degree of profusion and perfection; when representations of the human form found as much place in the scheme of decoration as the ornamental patterns that characterize the earlier, or Hinayana school. From the hands of Mahayanist master-craftsmen emerged the statues, the famous frontispiece of the Great Chapel, and the elaborate carvings of the Kanheri that has survived. Like all the great monasteries of that period, this one was richly endowed by the faithful with villages, lands, servants and cattle, though the monks themselves remained poor.

Kanheri is a contraction of Kanhagiri, the old name of the hill; and this, in its turn, is probably a corruption of the still older name, Krishnagiri. It may well have been the already established sanctity of the spot, as much as the formation of the hill and its situation, that called to those old Buddhist monastery-makers.

It is quite probable, too, that Buddhism first became known to the West through the traders from Egypt and the Middle East who came in contact with the monks of Kanheri during their sojourn in the rich trading centres of Sopara, Chemula, and Kalyan, in the early centuries of this era. The next contact of which there is any record comes after a lapse

of several centuries, when Dom João de Castro visited the still busy monastery in 1539. He was the first of a series of European travellers to leave in their relations of travel such a wealth of detail about their visits that it is possible to follow them almost step by step and reconstruct a vivid picture of Kanheri the inhabited, or the recently abandoned. In the quaint and exuberant style of his day, Dom João tells of the "many sumptuous temples and noble many-stoned palace-like buildings with images, columns, houses, porticoes, figures, pillars, cisterns, temples and chapels, all cut in the rock, a thing certainly not within the power of man, so wonderful that it may be ranked among the seven wonders of the world, unless," he continues in self-protection, "instead of thinking them to be the work of man, we attribute them to spirits and the diabolic art of which I, at least, have no doubt, . . ." And he admits that he has "no pen to portray its greatness and form."

Less than one hundred and fifty years later, the "anciently famed but now ruin'd City of Canorein" had become a spot where, just as today, tourists were taken to see the wonders of the past. The countryside was "delightsome", writes Dr. John Fryer in 1673, with "fine Arrables, Pasture, and Coppices"; the woods were peopled by apes, tigers, wild buffaloes, and parakeets, he says, and the last of the Buddhist monks had left. The Great Chapel was empty, the monstrous figures were unadorned, the relic mounds bare, but the wonderful system whereby the whole monastery had been supplied with fresh running water was still in good repair, and water from a tank at the foot of the hill still filled the cisterns and conduits. John Fryer, like many another before and after him, was amazed: "If it be so," he exclaims, "that it should have its Current upwards through the hard Rock artificially cut, the World cannot parallel so wonderful a Water-course!" Indeed, as late as 1825, when Bishop Heber visited Kanheri, the cisterns were still full with good water, even in the dry season.

At that time, too, the vaulted ceiling of the Great Chapel was still lined with its slim ribs of teakwood; there is no trace of them today, and the carvings are blurred. Many of the sculptures are disfigured, and over the relic mounds no longer rise those essentially Buddhist tiers of umbrellas, so minutely described by early travellers, and seen in their



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entirety in contemporary wall carvings. Bats flit about and squeak around the capitals of the tall columns, once swathed in the smoke of incense, and whose carvings were quickened into life by the flickering light of oil lamps. It is lucky that, after the monastery was abandoned, the Great Chapel was left to dream over the past and was not converted into a place of worship for any other creed, as Bishop Heber so wished to do for his own. At least, now still floats between the pillars a faint echo of the past when, at Dipavali, after the holy season of the rains, the yearly confession took place; when music, games, and dancing closed the festivities of the birthday of the Buddha, after images and relic shrines had passed with pomp in rich procession between rows of faithful.

While tracing the wayward track back from Kanheri towards Bombay, today's pilgrim may well wonder whether the future centuries will discover in the relics of the present age anything as inspiring and evocative as the past has bequeathed to us. Nowhere in the present-day world has a people been capable of building a place of worship that can compare on any point to its great works of utility. And, unless the atom bomb succeeds in its work of annihilation, the epitaph over our relics may well be: "Here lies a civilisation without a Faith."



MEGAPOLIS OF GUJARAT

The history of Ahmadabad presents yet another tormented chapter in the story of the Mohammedan kingdoms that were founded in India following on the predatory incursions of Mahmud of Ghazni, in the eleventh century. The history of Ahmadabad recounts how the capital of "Gujarland," a rich province always coveted by successive conquerors, reached heights of wealth, power, and renown, then gradually fell into utter decay, as a result partly of internal decadence and partly of the cupidity of external powers. One of the most pleasant, wealthy, and splendid cities of India at the close of the Middle Ages, it was destined to pay heavily for this wealth and renown acquired throughout the trading world, and for the place of honour accorded to it by travellers.

With Cambay and Gogha as its seaport, one of the most important trading centres of the West Coast, frequented by Arab and other traders as much before as after the present era ; with Somnath famous for its temple fabulously endowed with untold treasures ; with Anhilwara and Asawal, the old Hindu capitals, prosperous and rich, Gujarat suffered perhaps more greatly than any other region from the impact of Mahmud of Ghazni. But Gujarat had it within itself to recover from even those depredations and to reach an even greater degree of wealth and a wider range of renown ; in fact, the province was so well known and its king so powerful that travellers spoke of the King of Cambay as the King of India.

Ahmadabad itself, however, dates only from the first years of the fifteenth century. After Zafar Khan, the last governor to be appointed by the central power in Delhi, in 1391, seceded from the Tughlak yoke and founded the independent Sultanate of Gujarat, he placed his son Muhammad Shah on the throne, sometime between 1401 and 1404 ; he poisoned him three years later and himself ascended the throne ; Zafar Khan was in his turn poisoned by his grandson, Alp Khan, in the year 1411. Alp Khan, with the title of



Ahmad Shah, now took over the reins of the new kingdom and held them till his death in 1441. Despite his ruthless assumption of power, Sultan Ahmad proved himself to be an energetic and skilled administrator, a successful military leader, and a militant upholder of his faith ; though not the founder of the Ahmad Shahi dynasty, named after him, he inaugurated the greatness of the Sultanate.

Being fond of the air and the surroundings of Asawal, Ahmad Shah built a fair and noble city on its site, and named it Ahmadabad. The Bhadar citadel the nucleus of the new city, he erected round the old temple of Bhadra Kali on the left bank of the Sabarmati river, to whose waters he added those of the Hathmati. Handsome buildings made from the rich quarry of destroyed temples in Asawal, Anhilwara, and Chandravathi, with marbles from Ajmir and sandstone from Ahmadnagar, rose within the massive walls, fifteen feet to twenty feet high, with fourteen gates, and towers and bastions every twenty yards. Ahmadabad was planned with broad streets, some of which are reputed to have accommodated ten ox-carriages abreast ; most of the houses were of brick and mortar, with flat-tiled roofs on which the inhabitants spent the calm nights of the hot season. By gathering round him the merchants, weavers, and craftsmen of this tract of India—a tract that already had an ancient tradition of beautiful workmanship and skilled master builders—Sultan Ahmad made his capital a centre of trade and manufacture.

In 1459, his thirteen-year-old grandson, Mahmud Shah I, ascended the throne of Gujarat, ruling with brilliance, mastery, and foresight for fifty-two years—the longest lived and most eminent of the Ahmad Shahis. His achievements and personal peculiarities became legendary even in his lifetime; it was a belief that he had become immune to poison through having been dosed with it since childhood, thus evading all attempts on his life. Travellers from foreign lands found in his life a fund of material with which to enrich their tales. Like his grandfather he was a fanatic, but his contemporaries claim for him an abundance of justice, generosity, and soundness of judgment—a pattern of excellence. But Mahmud I, known to history as Begara, was great apart from the legends that sprang up about him ; he consolidated his kingdom, continued his grandfather's sound administration, and steered clear of interference in the affairs of other kingdoms. He



further enlarged and embellished Ahmadabad by erecting fine mosques and public buildings, by planting trees along the streets so that a traveller said, many years later, that from a height the city looked like a green forest; by building reservoirs, tanks, and fountains in every quarter of the city. Trade expanded and handicraftsmen were encouraged and the city walls were set in thorough repair—"whoever is within is safe," said Firishta. Mahmud Begara died in 1511.

After his death, the Sultans of Gujarat abandoned the policy of non-interference in the affairs of the neighbouring states. The new Sultan, Bahadur Shah, is known in the annals of Gujarat for the second sack of Chitor; he befriended and then affronted Humayun the Second Mughal, who defeated him in 1535; two years later Bahadur Shah died a tragic death half-way between his fort of Diu and a Portuguese ship on which he was to negotiate trade concessions and military aid with Nuño da Cunha. By his death were let loose all the forces of intrigue and anarchy of which a decadent nobility is capable; the exhausted Ahmad Shahi had lost its power to remain independent and, in 1573, Gujarat was annexed to the Mughal Empire with Akbar's famous lightning campaign in which he covered the six hundred odd miles between Fatehpur-Sikri and Ahmadabad in eleven days.

This change of rule, however, in no way impaired the city's activities; Ahmadabad continued as a centre of manufacture of fine handicrafts and textiles, and grew in prosperity and fame. Its silks and brocades and cotton cloths, known as Cambay Goods, were in demand and much prized throughout the eastern markets from Cairo to Peking; the port of Gogha bustled with activity as ships dropped anchor and chests of merchandise were transhipped into smaller craft for Cambay, and thence overland to Ahmadabad, bringing from markets far and wide the luxuries required by a splendid court and a voluptuous nobility; for, as wrote an early Portuguese traveller: "Gujarat Moors are luxurious people who live well and spend much money." In Ahmadabad were bartered and sent abroad opium from Malwa; horses, arms, and silken stuffs from Khorasan; indigo, tobacco, cotton, and grain from the province; the high priced raw silks from China, Bengal, and Basra. In the workshops painters on cloth, seal-engravers, inlayers of mother-o'-pearl, enamel and lacquer workers, carvers of wood, and steel, silver, and gold smiths



made the beautiful and justly famous cloths of gold and silver thread, the brocades and velvets, the cotton cloths that fetched one hundred times their value on the coast of Africa, and the exquisite boxes and inkstands, swords and daggers with ornamental handles. A whole community was kept at work with pottery from clay collected outside the city walls and mixed with earths of different colours to make the bright and handsome vessels and toys, polished with bamboos or strings of agates; "Ahmadabad paper" was known and esteemed wherever writing paper was used. Every ten days, during the busy season of November to April, caravans of two hundred wagons left Ahmadabad for Cambay, whence the merchandise was disseminated throughout the trading world.

One thousand stone mosques lifted their twin minarets above the city walls, displaying the art and skill of the workmen of Gujarat, whose stone tracery of unimaginable fineness and beauty is still a unique example of the genius of the province. Despite the impact of Western Asia through trade, and of the taste and talent of Mohammedan scholars at court, the master-builders retained their innate originality and evolved what has been termed the most Hindu of Indo-Saracenic styles. With its tree-shaded streets and handsome solid buildings, its abundant water-supply, its unrivalled display of the choicest produce from all over the globe, its rest-houses ornamented with overhanging pillared balconies of finely cut stone, its caravanserai street which was locked at both ends in the night for the safety of foreigners, and where those who wished could even rent houses, Ahmadabad appeared to the many travellers who stayed there, the handsomest city in Hindustan if not in the whole world; nor could they find any comparison just enough except the very best in their own countries. Such was Ahmad's city in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In this chorus of praise it is intriguing to hear one discordant note coming from no less a person than the Emperor Jahangir himself. "What beauty and excellence," he writes in his memoirs, "can the founder of this city have seen in this wretched land with its dust-laden air, its hot winds, its dry river bed, its brackish nasty water, and its thorn-covered suburbs, . . ." a description that fits present-day Ahmadabad well enough—and, indulging his discontent, he called it Gardabad (Dust City), Samumistan (Simoom Town), Zakum-



dar (Thorn City); then, on hearing that the plague had broken out, he exclaimed : "Bimaristan (Sickness Town)," and lastly, "Hell City, Jahannamabad!" Yet, from these same memoirs, it would seem that, in the company of Nur Jehan, he found the suburban gardens and moonlit nights of Ahmadabad sufficiently pleasant for incognito jaunts in ox-carriages, while the fairs of Ahmadabad goods, organised in the palace courtyard, pleased his sense of the unusual.

With the advent of the Portuguese in Indian waters, the traders of Gujarat first felt the shock of foreign competition; the new-comers considered them their keenest rivals whose ships were their richest prizes. Everywhere the Portuguese encountered the commercial predominance of the Great Kingdom of Gujarat whose merchants glutted the markets with their own goods to force up the price of local produce and, sometimes, stirred up sentiment in the towns where they traded in an effort to oust European trade. Damage was mutual, however, for though the merchants scored on land for a time, the Portuguese ruthlessly scored at sea by capturing large numbers of ships. But the age of foreign competition had set in: in the wake of the Portuguese came the English followed closely by the Dutch. The English Factory at Ahmadabad was established in 1614, and the Dutch shortly afterwards; European travellers were numerous, and Indian goods dazzled European markets. Despite the difficulties the new traders encountered on account of local and Portuguese rivalry, this was indeed a land of treasures for them which they were loath to abandon without the keenest fight; while the Factors enjoyed a spacious enough mode of living that more than compensated for the numbers who succumbed to sickness.

Then, after well over two centuries of brilliance, wealth, and power, the fortunes of Sultan Ahmad's city slowly turned; both natural and human agents combined to depose one of the foremost cities in India from its place of eminence to one of secondary importance. The head of the Gulf of Cambay began silting up and ships stopped calling. All the while the English and Dutch factories of Surat were gradually drawing to themselves the chief trade of the province. Commerce began to leave Ahmadabad, nor is it certain that the city has yet regained the predominance of those grand days. Scores of villages under the walls of Ahmadabad and on the borders of Kathiawar



war became deserted for lack of work ; the seamen of Gogha, those dreaded pirates of former times tamed to mercantile shipping, became a mere shadow of their former selves and had to turn from the sea towards the land.

Ahmadabad now entered upon a period as distressing as it was demoralising. The last days of Aurangzeb, in 1707, closed one chapter, and the rise of the Mahratta power opened another. Disorders inside and outside the city, highwaymen along the roads, changing hands from one ruthless freebooter to another ; plunder, pestilence, and plague, decimated the population and wrought havoc where order had reigned. All round the city, runs a contemporary report, the way lay through desolate waste ; trees and fields lay gaunt between ruins of houses where not a sign of life could be found except for tigers, hyenas, and jackals. The walls were broken down in many places, the broad streets were without trees or pavements, and much of the city was bare or in ruins. Public buildings were in decay and dishonour ; the population had dwindled from the nine hundred thousand of its heyday to a mere hundred thousand ; there were few signs of trade or manufacture except for a little weaving and handicraft. All was solitude, poverty, and desolation. Pride, seemingly, grovelled in an abyss of despair.

By now, however, the British had established their power in India ; by the Treaty of Poona, 1817, the East India Company took over Ahmadabad from the Gaekwad ; anarchy was stopped and the city slowly began to revive, for old habits die hard. Much was rebuilt or repaired, but nineteenth century reconstruction could never equal the beauty or inspiration of the architecture for which the city was famous, and the streets have remained treeless. Trade flowed back into Ahmadabad ; in 1861 the first cotton mill was opened ; the American Civil War and the railway from Bombay repaired, to a certain extent, the damage caused by one hundred years of disorder ; large fortunes were once more found in the city that had counted millionaires among its merchants. But it was cotton, now, and no more the brocades, velvets, and handicrafts of former times that spelt the rehabilitation of Ahmadabad, for Gujarat had always been a cotton-growing province ; cotton had nourished the development of its capital, and it was cotton again that attended its resurrection.

Today, Ahmadabad is one of the greater mill centres of



TALES FROM THE VOICELESS

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India, claiming to weave the finest cloth. It is a busy city, with many fair mansions in the suburbs, of which Shahi Bagh brings to mind the days of the Sultanate and of Jahangir ; and the Sabarmati is now spanned by a tall iron bridge. Across this Sabarmati, facing the massive walls that had kept out all but the faithful, and had stood for the safety and wealth of those within ; across the Sabarmati, on the road to the jail, is the modest Sabarmati Ashram where was revived a form of spinning that belongs to the days of Ahmadabad's greatness and that contributed to its prosperity. It was from this Ashram, too, that Gandhiji's historic Dandi March was started. The city has retained the tall blocks of dwellings built round a central courtyard, so characteristic of Ahmadabad planning ; some of these are ancestral homes whose owners live in these suburbs but come on the two great kite-flying days of the year to compete in kite-fights from the flat tiled roofs. From these heights, the city no longer looks like a green forest ; instead, smoke from factory chimneys pervades the air—this is the emblem of Ahmadabad's twentieth century prosperity, the cotton mill. And the city's prosperity rests, 'tis said, on three threads—gold, silk, and cotton.



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MEMORIES OF CENTRAL INDIA

The great highway through Central India that carries the traveller from more southerly regions up to Agra and Delhi passes through the State of Gwalior, whose capital lies at the foot of the famous rampart-engirdled hill known, some ten centuries ago, as the Key to India. Possession of the Fort of Gwalior meant, from the establishment of the first Sultans down to the time of Akbar the Mughal, command of the Malwa plateau and a relatively easy approach on the one hand to the wealthy territories of the west and, on the other, to the prosperous territories of the east and, on both, to the farther south.

Today Gwalior does not hold the same political position, though the memory of its one-time importance still lingers in many a noble fort or well-known place-name, deriving their strength and prosperity from this formidable stronghold. Though all these events happened long ago, a knowledge of them helps to understand why history has to record so many battles and struggles for possession of this fort which, in the context of present-day circumstances, may appear out of all proportion.

But the regions around Gwalior were not merely scenes of political struggles ; the characteristic countryside that blooms to such captivating beauty with the first rains and only dons the desolate garb of summer towards the end of April, once the *pa'llas* has shed its flaming boatlets over the dried earth, has its tales of secluded spots devoted to abstract thought and contemplation, or townships where the folk worked with scarce a thought for the ambitions of those who ruled the land. The highway itself will take the traveller through some of these and lead him past others, if he but keeps his senses alert to the message of the countryside.

At the junction of the main roads from the west country and from the east country stands the little summer capital of the State of Gwalior. Sivpuri is small and straggling, and one has to seek out the town amongst clumps of trees and over



fields; but it is there, none the less, very charming, very quiet, and unobtrusive. There is, of course, a summer palace and a Secretariat; there is a small railway station where the little train loads on its rural freight of passengers and goods to bear it at a leisurely pace through glade and field to and from the permanent capital. There is a very extensive and very fine park adjoining the two mausoleams of the ruling family; in these lie the great-grandmother and the grandfather of the present prince. The more recent mausoleum, especially, with its beautiful inlay of semi-precious stones, is a pleasing evidence that good workmanship is by no means extinct. Surrounded by rolling country and wooded slopes spreads a vast lake used, when the court is in residence, for boating and sailing. These slopes where once in a way the tiger and the panther roam, local belief peoples with wild elephants at the time of Akbar; they say that once, on his return from Mandu, the emperor stayed here to catch a host of them. The loveliest spot in Siypuri, however, is the rocky dale in which springs a rill of clear water that gurgles and shimmers over moss-grown boulders down to a tank farther on. The overhanging trees are a sanctuary for birds; to one side has been excavated from the rock a small temple for Siva. Man can build no more inspiring shrine to his God than the arches of trees and the virile ruggedness of the rocks, nor can his chanting surpass in sincere spontaneity the note of happy birds.

Wandering along the roads of the reserved forest tracts and joining the main road towards Jhansi, the unattentive traveller may well miss the signpost at a turning some miles farther on that points to Suruwaya. The road leads to what was once a quite opulent little town, though today there is nothing to see save a quiet village of cultivators and a group of imposing ruins.

The ruins of this forgotten town of Central India—Saraswatipattana that time and usage have contracted to Suruwaya—tell fragments of a story that dates back from at least the tenth century of this era onwards for some six hundred years. Suruwaya was the capital—or the seat—of princes of the Pratihara and Jajapella lines of Rajputs; later, in the twelfth or thirteenth century, it came under the rule of the Sultans of Delhi. Inscriptions record the names of a Raja Sahasamala and of a queen-mother Salashanadevi,



but the history is obscure because the inscriptions dated towards the end of the thirteenth century are short, and they throw but little light on the people who lived there, their occupations, or the deeds of their rulers. The ruins themselves, however, have much more to tell to the lover of art and antiquities.

Within the precincts of the powerful dark red fort that, to judge by its construction, dates from Muslim times, are three small temples originally dedicated to Vishnu; there are also a step, or *badaoli*, well built of uncemented stone blocks, and a monastery of some antiquity. Only part of the second storey of the monastery is still intact; the roof is particularly remarkable for its curious and solid construction of long, plank-like blocks of stone, the one overlapping the other in neatly fitting tiers, and set entirely without mortar. The ground floor was planned to suit the simplicity of an abode for recluses: the cells are small and the doorways lower than a man's height. A pretty little shrine crowns the apex of the roof; its presence there is strange and unaccountable, and it looks quaintly charming, lonely, and detached. This monastery is one of the few of its kind north of the Vindhya.

The three temples are all that remain of the numerous shrines which appear to have surrounded the medieval monastery. They are all badly mutilated, having lost their towers, and one of them, its portico and doorframe. Some of the sculptures seem to have been deliberately destroyed and others removed from their original niches; but those that have remained whole, as well as the fragments, display a high standard of sculptural skill and artistic conception. The exquisitely carved ceiling of the portico of the largest shrine, with its fine decorative detail, is a never-ending source of pleasure to the eye and the senses, while the friezes, high-reliefs, and statues are all very beautiful and vigorous. Such liveliness instils the lines and movements of the figures that the whole pantheon seems to come to life in the changing light of day and the play of shadows.

A lake was excavated in more recent times quite close to Suruwaya and a canal started, to connect it with the lake of Sivpuri. There is an almost tangible feel of stillness in the air; it is the stillness of repose and contemplation, not of death. In these surroundings the mind hesitates to shatter the intense quiet with even the memory of the bustle that must have filled



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the town that once stood here, or with the clangor of long forgotten and now meaningless battles. Tall age-old tamarind trees caress the dark red walls that tower above the dried-up moat of long ago. The austere and perfectly shaped archway is moss-grown, and the flags ring and echo to the step of the rare visitor. A charming, lonely spot is this, dignified in its undisturbed and all but unrecognised solitude.

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